

LITTLE MISS
· DEE ·



ROSWELL FIELD

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Little Miss Dee



Very sincerely yours
Agatha Lee

Little Miss Dee

By
Roswell Field



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To the Memory of Her

Little Miss Dee

WHEN the bugles sounded the charge, and Lieutenant Dee, his sword pointed toward the enemy, led the onslaught that marked the beginning of the glorious rout at Palo Alto, all the world would have wondered if all the world had enjoyed those facilities which are notable accessories to our present heroism. That this valiant officer has not figured more prominently in the proud military record of his country must be attributed, in part at least, to the unfortunate length of time elapsing between the accomplishment of a valorous deed and its announcement to admiring and appreciative fellow-countrymen. True heroism did not receive its immediate and full reward until telegraphic communication had been securely established.

If Major Nicholas Dee, late of the American army of invasion in Mexico,

Little Miss Dee

could have taken the discriminating public into his confidence, and spoken with that amiable confidence which characterizes the confessions of a recognized veteran, he would have contended that much family adversity had been caused by the thoughtless, and possibly malicious, remark of a gypsy three centuries before. It was not the Major's habit to discourse in public on his private affairs, and perhaps even this revelation does violence to the proprieties that should be observed in the case of a chivalrous and modest gentleman, but it is essential to a full understanding of the embarrassment under which the Dees, collectively and individually, had labored since the strolling fortune-teller was prompted to fire the family ardor.

This communication in itself would be necessarily of considerable antiquity, for the American forces withdrew from Mexico more than half a century ago, and the valiant Major did not survive that imperishable but somewhat equivocal campaign many years. More than this, the Major

Little Miss Dee

had personal and delicate reasons for declining to introduce the public to family secrets, and his sensitiveness was in no wise decreased by the fact that, so far as outward demonstrations showed, the gypsy lady had been guilty of palpable deceit. A man may be brave enough to admit that he is in the wrong, and that he has gone through life the victim of an amiable delusion, but he is hardly so bold as to acknowledge that his family has been humbugged through a dozen generations, and that the last is no wiser than the first. As a man of proper family pride, Major Nicholas Dee stood nobly by his ancestors.

It came about in this way. Three, or it may have been four or five, hundred years ago, the Dees were living in England, presumably in comfortable circumstances. The family record is not available, and for that matter it is of no special public interest what our ancestors were doing before or in the time of the Tudors. The tradition only concerns us, and the tradition is perfectly established that the

Little Miss Dee

Dees were excellent subjects, faithful to their creed, and loyal to their king. So many Dees of eminent repute are now living in Anglo-Saxon countries that it would be manifestly unwise and ungenerous to go into minute particulars, hence it shall not be put down whether it was at a castle, or a plain country gentleman's dwelling, that the gypsy appeared one day, and for a small consideration delivered her prophecy in the interesting, but occasionally baffling, language of the period. Divested of its mediæval phraseology, and reduced to modern English, the prophecy may be repeated thus:

The ancient family of Dee
A hero in its line shall see;
A hundred years may yet elapse,
Two hundred years, or three, perhaps;
But all in time a lustrous deed
Shall from this race and stock proceed;
Though how, or when, or even where,
Prophetic lips may not declare.

Possibly if the canny Dee to whom this comforting prediction had been delivered had been a little more liberal in his remu-

Little Miss Dee

neration, the gypsy lady would have relented and have been more specific in her bill of particulars, but she doubtless considered that she had given him the full value of his money, and when the gentleman, urged by the upbraiding and curiosity of his wife, sought her out with new inducements for further information, she had vanished, and the golden moment had fled. The penurious gentleman died without fulfilling the prophecy, and was succeeded by his son, who was similarly unsuccessful, and so the family lived along from one generation to another, very honestly and reputably, but in no way giving unusual signs of extraordinary heroism or dazzling promises of a lustrous deed.

In the troubled days of the Stuarts the inheritor of the gypsy prophecy stood valiantly by his king, and cursed and fought the Roundheads with equal vigor, and when Cromwell came into power and heads began to tumble, Richard Dee was among the first of the cavaliers to turn his back on his country and seek a new home across

Little Miss Dee

the water in the pleasant land of Virginia. The years had gone swiftly, the family had lived apparently up to its opportunities, and had passed through turmoil, revolt, and bloodshed, but the prophecy was unfulfilled, and the hero was unrevealed, when Nicholas Dee, in direct descent, succeeded to the family acres and the family mission.

The conditions under which the Dees had lived for a century and a half were not exactly conducive to deeds of heroism, as commonly understood, and Nicholas, who had a martial soul in a somewhat lethargic body, and who was appreciably ashamed of the inability of his family to live up to the prophecy which had been drummed into him in infancy, applied for and received a military education to put himself in a position to redeem the family name. Unfortunately the opportunities for heroism in military operations were not forthcoming, and for years Lieutenant Dee dragged out an existence varied only in its weariness by a thrifty marriage and the

Little Miss Dee

birth of a little girl. The rosy ambitions of vindicating the gypsy's word which Nicholas might have entertained were fast vanishing when the troubles broke out along the Mexican border. Lieutenant Dee was with General Taylor when that eminent soldier issued marching orders, and was promptly the first to fall at the glorious battle of Palo Alto.

But though the fates decreed so unkindly, Nicholas fell with great credit to himself, and with so many and such diversified wounds that his recovery was considered impossible. That he should live to return to his home and family was miraculous; that he should be henceforth unfit either for military service or arduous physical labor was a concession on the part of Providence, for which, many of his neighbors argued, he should be profoundly grateful. As for his own opinions on the subject, the public would be forced to ask him for another grant of confidence, so grimly did he bear himself under this cruel and seemingly final blow to his hopes. It has

Little Miss Dee

been already hinted that like a wise and prudent soldier Nicholas Dee had provided himself with a wife with a comfortable fortune in her own right, and his country, if only to prove that republics are not necessarily ungrateful, gave him a little pension; so, by means of this aggregated wealth, the veteran, his wife, and little Agatha, now in her twelfth year, were enabled to face the world with no bitterer thoughts than sympathetic regret for the misfortune of the husband and father, and concern for the unfulfillment of the gypsy prophecy.

Strangely enough, with a complete knowledge of his ruined health and shattered body, and of the further fact that he was well advanced in middle life, the pensioner could not quite relinquish the idea that through him the Dees were to be immortalized, and the human race distinctly benefited. He argued to himself, very plausibly, that lustrous deeds are not confined to feats of arms, and that there are many acts of true heroism, and to the human advantage, in no way connected

Little Miss Dee

with a martial career and the storming of cities. Why would it not be possible for him, crippled though he might be, to seek in another field that imperishable renown which was destined to be the reward of his race? He discussed the matter earnestly with his wife, but that estimable lady, while conjugally sympathizing with his ambitions, was too indolent and inert to attach vast importance to the utterances of a strolling gypsy in search of a fee, more especially since they involved considerable physical trouble, and she intimated that so far as the matter concerned her she was satisfied with well enough and disposed to let it alone. This exhibition of philosophy temporarily disconcerted Nicholas, but as a gentleman with enfeebled body and no pressing occupation has plenty of time to think, his dreams and desires returned regularly, not a little intensified by the periods of rest.

Mrs. Dee, who had been Betty Calverley and a distant connection of the Dée family, had married contrary to the wishes of her

Little Miss Dee

father, who objected to the young soldier, principally because he was unstable and visionary. In justice to Nicholas it may be explained that 'Squire Calverley regarded every young man of property visionary if he betrayed the slightest symptoms of a desire to break away from the refinements of an indolent, easy-going life. It was lamentably true of Betty Calverley that she suffered from periodic fits of mental aberration, and the old 'Squire always insisted that she was afflicted with dementia when she married Dee, though this statement could never be backed up by convincing evidence. Nevertheless, it did happen that in later life the spells of madness became more frequent, and were promptly attributed by her family to the perversity of the husband.

The more thought the pensioner gave to the subject of the prophecy the more that which had been merely a gentle stimulus became a passion, until finally it absorbed his whole nature, and was looked upon by his wife and those who were in his confi-

Little Miss Dee

dence as an irritating mania. It was pointed out to him very clearly that whatever is to be will be; that heroes are developed by force of circumstances, and that the will of Providence is not to be changed or hurried by the machinations of man. This theory of predestination, however, did not convert Nicholas Dee, who replied with much spirit that Providence helps him who helps himself, and that a man must put himself in the way of opportunity, not waiting for opportunity to rise up and smite him. Meanwhile, pending these arguments back and forth, the family lived comfortably, and to all intents and purposes the human race seemed to be prospering and enjoying life as it came.

To add to the discontent of Nicholas, many of those whom he had known in childhood had packed up their belongings and moved to the West, and there came back to him marvelous stories of adventure and prosperity, with the further allure-ment of adventure yet to come in a country scarcely in the infancy of development.

Little Miss Dee

They told him of a wonderful town on the bank of a great river, the possibilities of which defied exaggeration, and the soul of the old pensioner was fired as it had not been thrilled since the day of the march into Mexico. He conferred again with his wife, argued incessantly and unwearyingly, demonstrated forcefully the folly of a humdrum existence in a community from which all that was reminiscent had vanished, and by his prayers and pleadings so exhausted the long-suffering woman that she reluctantly yielded to his importunities and consented to accompany him whither his ardent spirit and infirm body might lead. By this reprehensible method Nicholas Dee contrived to establish himself in his new home in the Middle West in eager expectation of the adventure which was to justify his foresight.

To one unacquainted with the motives which controlled all the actions of the old pensioner it would have seemed that he had been guided by unusual intelligence. His new home, which overlooked the river

Little Miss Dee

and the rolling country beyond, with its terraced garden and great forest trees, was regularly and honorably saluted by the steamers as they passed up and down, and was pointed out to passengers by admiring captains as an amazing illustration of opulence. The town itself, which the inhabitants firmly believed might become eventually the national capital, was thrifty and progressive for the period, and apparently there was nothing wanting to gratify the reasonable wishes of a home-seeker. Nicholas himself, once established, was treated with the most deferential consideration by his new friends and acquaintance, visibly impressed by the loftiness of his views on all topics, and he was at once dignified by the title of Major, as a fitting tribute to one who had survived the horrors of war and was in full enjoyment of a pension from an appreciative country.

Two things conspired to dampen the ardor of Nicholas Dee in his quest of adventure. Though universally admired and respected for his amiable qualities and his

Little Miss Dee

large assertion of public spirit, his political convictions were wholly at variance with the opinions of his neighbors and fellow-citizens, and whatever thoughts of a public career he may have entertained were suddenly and cruelly dissipated. "It is really amazing," he confessed, mournfully, to his wife, "how we Dees have always managed to get on the unpopular side of every public question. I dare say," he added, "that if my great ancestor had been disloyal and unscrupulous enough to associate himself with Cromwell instead of King Charles—God bless him!—I should be at this moment governor of Massachusetts, or some other dignitary of wealth and importance in a Yankee commonwealth, instead of subjecting myself to the humiliation of living out here and being ignominiously beaten in a candidacy for the legislature." He paused and then said, reflectively, and with a return of cheerfulness, "After all, that would not have fulfilled the prophecy, for I can see nothing heroic or beneficial in either."

Little Miss Dee

The second calamity that overtook Nicholas Dee was the death of his wife, who never entirely forgave herself for yielding so spiritlessly to her husband's thirst for adventure, and who had found it impossible to reconcile herself to her new surroundings. Indeed, it had been staunchly maintained by the members of her father's family, who cherished the old tradition, that Nicholas had secured her consent and had made the change of home at a time when she was mentally irresponsible. This Mrs. Dee had loyally denied, but it remained an open and vexatious question. The blow of her taking away fell at a time when Nicholas had been investing rather too freely in various Quixotic enterprises, but not before the watchful woman, taking advantage of a period of sanity, and understanding the nature of her husband, had cautiously put the family home and the remnant of her fortune in the name of her daughter, who was already exhibiting qualities somewhat at variance with the laws of inheritance.

Little Miss Dee

The old man, aged by infirmities rather than by years, never fully recovered his confidence and his spirits after his comrade and helper had left him. "And to think," he sighed, pathetically, "that she should leave me just at the time when I was at the point of accomplishing the purpose of the family!"

Alas for Nicholas Dee, dreamer of dreams, and pursuer of phantoms! Alas for us all, impeded and distracted by the allurements of visions never to materialize, of fancies never to be effected! It was not the less pathetic that the old pensioner actually believed his own words and trusted in them, that the shadows which came with every disappointment were dispelled by the deluding light of further dreaming.

FROM the time that Agatha Dee had acquired the distinction of young womanhood, it had not been quite satisfactorily explained why she was spoken of as "Little Miss Dee." Little she certainly was not, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, for at the shortest she was above the ordinary height, and the most careless glance would have compelled the admission that her weight was amply in proportion; so the explanation was of necessity sought in other directions. Possibly the most reasonable deduction was that she had come naturally by the affectionate diminutive, and by the continued qualities of graciousness had retained it. Whatever truth may have lain in this conclusion, it remained a fact that "Little Miss Dee" she had been and "Little Miss Dee" she was destined to be to the end of her cheery existence.

Agatha Dee, when all her personal

Little Miss Dee

charms were considered, may not have been wholly the type of feminine beauty an ambitious romancist would select as the heroine of a stirring love story. Even with the responsibilities of a family prophecy resting upon her, Agatha would have confessed candidly and humbly that the possibilities of achieving fame and fortune by the usual methods of feminine loveliness were not alluring; yet, notwithstanding this discouraging confession, her personality was attractive. Her figure was good, her features, rather large, were in proportion, her firm chin showed decision, and her nose indicated intellect. The great gray eyes with the long lashes and the dark brows were the dominant feature of a face which, if it fell short in the softer lines of merely physical beauty, was engaging in the character portrayed, and when Agatha shook out the brownish black hair that tumbled over her shoulders and fell down below her waist, many an acknowledged fair might have sighed with envy.

And Little Miss Dee knew what it was

Little Miss Dee

to be admired and loved for qualities other than the charm of beauty; for the gentleness of her nature, the sunniness of her disposition, and the sympathetic generosity of a heart that always responded impulsively to appeal justified the affection she inspired. No seer or fortune-teller or palmister came into her young life to whisper large promises of happiness and wealth, or disturb her in the serenity of the peaceful years of childhood, and she grew up content with her little world, satisfied with the innocent conquest of those around her, and believing that away from the environment of such love and tenderness no greater joy was possible.

The passing of Mrs. Dee had marked the surrender of the old pensioner to the inevitable. To be scrupulously exact, his efforts had been more in the line of plotting than of practice, but even this amiable weakness was now crushed out of him. "It is not for me," he said to Agatha, when he had formally summoned her to a consultation, and had solemnly declared his

Little Miss Dee

determination to abandon all enterprises tending to the rehabilitation of the family bugbear; "the curse of the family is on me, and I must bow before it."

"But, father," said Agatha, rather wearily perhaps, for she was familiar with this announcement, "I do not presume to object to your way of putting it, but really I cannot see why the curse, as you call it, should disturb us. We are comfortably off; we have a beautiful home; our neighbors are very kind; and everybody looks up to you and loves and admires you, even if you have not been elected to office as you hoped. It is not our fault that the people here happen to be wrong in their political views."

The old man was pained. "I am surprised," he said, chidingly, "that you should think that such trifles could worry me. You forget the prophecy, my dear. You forget that from our family is to proceed a hero who is to perform a deed that will give us an imperishable name."

"I am not likely to forget that, father,"

Little Miss Dee

said Agatha, with a faint smile, as she patted the old man's head; "but weren't you a hero when you stood up at Palo Alto before the enemy and permitted yourself to be shot to pieces? Didn't the newspapers give you full credit for your heroism, and aren't you wearing a medal for your bravery? Certainly I can't see how the prophecy can ask anything more than that without being most unreasonable."

"That was a mere trifle," interrupted the veteran, hastily, "and has nothing to do with the prophecy which speaks for more glorious achievements. I don't mean to say that I might not have accomplished something truly valorous if I had had a chance, but what chance has a man when the first time he goes into action he is crippled by a few wandering bullets, and that, too, before the battle has fairly begun? My old general has been elected to the Presidency, and many of my comrades have gained distinction in Congress, while I must content myself with the reflection

Little Miss Dee

that only for an 'if' I, too, might have been heard of in the world."

"The world is a large place," said Agatha, looking out of the window and over to the prairie which lay beyond the river.

"Still," persisted the old man, "I am sure that I should have been heard of if it had not been for the curse of our family, the fatality which has pursued us and has found means to thwart us just as fame and fortune were in our reach. The invention of your great-uncle Caleb startled the scientific world, but he was robbed both of the fame and the fruits of his genius by the unscrupulous capitalist who bought his brains."

"It seems to me," suggested the girl a little mischievously, "that if Uncle Caleb's suggestion startled the world he came very near fulfilling the prophecy. Perhaps it would have been the same, however, if he had not been robbed, for after all it was only the scientific world."

The old pensioner was disconcerted. "I

Little Miss Dee

never thought of that," he said at last. "Really if I could believe it I should be quite happy. And there was my cousin Calverley," he went on with sudden energy, "he was a famous writer, though in a small way. One night he outlined the plot of a story to a friend, and the miserable dog actually stole the whole thing and dated a successful career as a novelist purely from the use of that suggestion. My grandfather, when he was a member of the Virginia legislature, drafted a bill which upturned the whole state and became a national issue, but another member presented it, and it passed under his name and made him famous. Even I, with the prospect of a renowned military career, suffered from the ill luck that seems to have maliciously pursued us."

"In other words"—and this with a touch of gayety—"you won the battle of Palo Alto, and your luckier comrades profited by it. Dear old daddy, it was a shame, wasn't it?"

"It may have been so. At all events

Little Miss Dee

they won their way into the national life while I received a medal which nobody remembers except you and myself. I don't say this repiningly; I merely wish to illustrate the strange caprice of fate which has dealt so unkindly with our family. But though I have failed, as others have failed before me, we need not utterly despair. You are still left."

Then Agatha threw her head back and laughed. "I?" she exclaimed. "And pray what can I do, since you and grandfather and your cousin and Uncle Caleb and fifteen generations of Dees have failed?"

"Bless me, I don't know," frankly replied the veteran, "but I do know that we have done nothing, and there is not a word in the prophecy that makes any sex distinction or indicates that you or any other female descendant may not succeed where we have fallen down. And the age of miracles has not passed," he added, rather ungallantly.

Agatha smiled, quizzically. "I am still

Little Miss Dee

young, father," she said, "and there may be some hope and consolation in that, but I am afraid, I am fated to be neither heroic nor lustrous, and I am certainly not very imposing"—this rather plaintively—"still it is a pleasant prospect you are holding out to me, and I hope I shall be equal to your expectations."

Such conversations were not infrequent in the Dee household, and Agatha, whether from a sense of humor within proper feminine limits or from a gentle filial instinct, yielded to her father's whim, and even encouraged him to believe that she had serious ideas of coming to the rescue of the family. "Not," she would have unequivocally admitted, "that I see in myself the faintest evidences of a heroine, or the slightest traces of luster, and not that I find much opportunity for glorious deeds in a little country town, but it eases father's mind, and is perfectly harmless provided I do not permit the idea to take possession of me." How could Agatha Dee know that the daughter of a visionary

Little Miss Dee

father and an unbalanced mother could not play with hallucinations, though apparently harmless? So the days went on, and in the intervals of practical domestic monotony the young woman discharged the ordinary duties of her calling and entered heartily into such pleasures as came into her youth.

In spite of the handicap of an unfulfilled mission and the pressing weight of several centuries of family responsibility, Little Miss Dee lived the placid life of her environment with such occasional irruptions of excitement as the dissipations of a small town can afford. From time to time lovers came on a solemn office, for it was natural enough that the daughter of Nicholas Dee, considered an heiress as the people and the period went, should find favor with those of her own set who constituted the aristocracy of the county. But back in Virginia, before the fever of adventure had afflicted Nicholas, Agatha had known and shyly loved Herbert Ainslie, the son of the village carpenter, and not even the

Little Miss Dee

assurance that he was a good carpenter could reconcile the Dees to the horrors of a possible misalliance. Her mother's family was equally scandalized. That the daughter of a Calverley should have married a Dee was humiliating enough; that her daughter should by any possibility take even a childish interest in the son of a carpenter was a thought not to be endured.

The Ainslies had preceded the Dees in the Western invasion, and it must have been what the Major called the "family ill luck" that so contrived it that the two houses should be again pitted against each other in the same town. Agatha Dee had been brought up to appreciate the full value of her name and importance in her little social world, but she was shrewd enough to see that a young man who had made the most of his opportunities was infinitely preferable to those who were satisfied with the luck of birth, and she was feminine enough to believe that the heart is not always an unsafe guide in the affairs of love. Herbert Ainslie, notwith-

Little Miss Dee

standing a strange mixture of dreaminess and energy which were continually warring with each other, had a certain independence which greatly assisted Agatha in coming to this conclusion. If it ever occurred to him that the son of a carpenter has any limitations which prevent him from making any effort in life, he did not betray it, and he lost no precious time in securing from his early friend and playmate a confession of her regard, and a vague and indefinite promise of loyalty to her love. With this information to relieve his mind, Herbert watched the arrival of other claimants with gentlemanly indifference, and at the same time was more amused than disconcerted by the attitude of the suspicious father, whose dislike was now intensified by the suddenly conceived idea of his daughter's mission.

But Herbert, whose impetuosity of youth was by no means overshadowed by his other qualities, and who had a lofty masculine contempt for feminine heroics, had already waited as long as he felt courtesy and consideration demanded; and as he

Little Miss Dee

was now in a position to maintain an establishment, with reasonable deference to modesty, he promptly mentioned that fact to Agatha, and intimated that her prompt compliance would be expected. But Agatha, who was not wholly without spirit, and who, notwithstanding the sincerity of her affection, did not relish the idea of such early dictation, demurred vigorously. It all came out one evening as they sat at the end of the garden on the bluff overlooking the river and argued the question in its various phases. Agatha had just delivered an opinion that her duty to her father was paramount to every other earthly consideration, and that in his present infirm condition she could listen to nothing that would jeopardize his peace of mind.

"I suppose I am to infer," said Herbert, bitterly, "that any reference to me would destroy your father's happiness."

"We both have reason to know," replied Agatha, seriously, "that it certainly would not add to it. But that is not the question, Herbert. There is a perfect

Little Miss Dee

understanding between us—at least I have thought so—and it seems most unfortunate that we cannot wait a little longer.”

“A little longer?” echoed the lover. “It seems more unfortunate to me that there is no definite limit to this period of waiting, and that you do not care to realize that I have been loving and waiting for you all the years we have been together since we were little children.”

The earnestness of his tone touched her, and she knew that he spoke the truth. She might have given in to his pleading had not the vision of the old father in his infirmity come up before her. For an instant she was almost angry with him for his insistence, with herself for the call of duty. “While we have taken ourselves seriously as we should,” she answered, “there was no understanding that every object in life should give way to this incidental and rather selfish programme we have mapped out.” And seeing how her words cut him, and how he winced at their apparent lightness, she repented, and said, more gently, “You

Little Miss Dee

know, Herbert, there are duties which we must take into account."

"Even the fulfillment of the family prophecy?"

She flushed at the thrust. "That is ungenerous and unworthy of you," she answered; "that stupid prophecy! But since you are pleased to include it, let it go at that. I hardly thought, however, that you would reproach me for a silly superstition that I told you in confidence, and in which, as you well know, I have not, and never have had, the slightest belief."

Then the lover grew penitent like a true knight. "It was a burst of idiocy, I admit," he cried, "and I don't deserve your pardon, but think how much this means to me, and just as I am going away."

"Going away?" The girl was looking off down the river, not trusting herself to say more. The young man, too, was silent. He was thinking of what lay beyond in the great world he longed to enter,

Little Miss Dee

of the fortune he might gain, of the glory he should win. She was thinking of the little life that had rippled along so gently and easily, and which, it had seemed to her in the carelessness of youth, must glide as placidly forever. Was it yesterday, or the day before, that she and Herbert Ainslie had played together as children? Had the hour-hand traveled round the clock since she had confessed to this man that she loved him? Yet already he spoke of going away. This was the man in whom she had believed, in whose love she had trusted. Her woman's mind could not understand the masculine restlessness that seemed to speak for inconstancy. How differently she had looked at their compact, and what could possibly come up in the way of worldly ambition that could lead her away from him? What a small and wretched creature is man, and how vain are his pretensions when judged by the standard of a woman's faith!

Agatha was still looking off into the distance and wondering if such could be the

Little Miss Dee

nature of a true lover, when he broke the silence.

“A man can’t waste the best years of his life in a stupid little country town, trying to develop by village methods, and I am going to the city to try a new start. Can’t you see that I do not wish to make it a false start, Agatha?”

The reproach had gone from her voice as she replied: “It is not the prophecy, Herbert; you are sure of that. It is not that I care less for you than I have cared in the years we have grown up together. It is not that under ordinary conditions I would not follow you gladly to the city or anywhere in the world. But what are we to gain? Can we be happier there than here? Is there so lovely a spot as this, and,” she added, softly, “who is it that says that love grows on loveliness?”

It seemed to Agatha as she spoke that nature conspired with her to make him forget his resolution and bring him back to the old, glad life. The moonlight filtered through the thick branches of the great

Little Miss Dee

trees and shimmered on the waters of the river down below. The scent of the blossoms came from the garden, and the soft breath of the prairie blew from the distant country. How often they had sat together in the intoxication of such a spell. But his thoughts were still on the restless life in a larger world, and his eyes were shut to the beauties he had loved. He did not reply, so full he was of the dreams of ambition, and she said:

“You know how I am placed, and where my present duty lies. You have seen my father, old and childish, and dependent on me alone. I cannot leave him, and I do not dare look beyond the limit of his life. You have come to me when I am helpless and I can do nothing.”

Then Herbert, who saw that the girl was weeping, came to himself, repented again, and consoled her in that wonderful way known only to true lovers. And he told her of his plans, for her and himself, and spoke eagerly of the time when she should join him and they should live again

Little Miss Dee

the old day-dreaming. And her foolish heart fluttered when he showed her the miniature she had given him, and she blushed with joy when he replaced it over his heart and vowed it should stay there until she came to him.

So he comforted her, and they sat and talked in the moonlight of some far-off day which meant emancipation and happiness for both, and they discoursed much foolishness which is the joy and romance of youth, and made wonderful plans and built impossible castles and banished all thought of trouble and pain in the intoxication of the springtime of love. And what they dreamed that night millions of lovers have dreamed before them, and millions will continue to dream in the ecstasy of young passion. But the following day Herbert went off to the distant city to begin the new life, and the girl, with a singing heart, went back to her father and her duty. And neither knew that written plainly in the book of fate Little Miss Dee's first romance was dead.

YOU followers of romance and implacable avengers of feminine wrongs, who are earnest and outspoken in condemnation of Herbert Ainslie, remember that at this time he stood for nothing notable in human experience or developed character. And you wise philosophers and cynics, do not laugh at Agatha because she dreamed foolishly in her little domain of girlish ignorance and innocently believed all the nonsense that makes the world go round. Happily there are not a few who, having trodden the same path, recognize the power of environment, the disenchantment of absence, and justly believe that what is might not have been with unchanged conditions. Love is not utterly repulsed and hearts are not easily broken at one and twenty.

Agatha accepted the situation with all the equanimity of a young woman with responsibilities and a mission, and went

Little Miss Dee

about her daily tasks with a calmness that spoke volumes for her strength of resolution. Herbert did not immediately prove recreant, but the letters which came, grudgingly at first, at last ceased altogether, so pressing are the cares and obligations of a young man carving his fortune in a strange city. Thus the days lengthened into weeks, and the weeks into months, and the inhabitants of the future capital of the nation lived their peaceful lives, while the grass grew bountifully along and in the streets, and the rush of trade forbore to disturb their serenity or molest their indolence.

One day Agatha came to her father, her face glowing with the joy of a wonderful inspiration. The old man had already passed the stage of active interference with the affairs of the household, but his dutiful daughter lovingly humored him by pretending to consult him before taking any important step, and the victim of filial feminine guile gloried in the unsuspected humbug. She sat on the edge of his chair, affection-

Little Miss Dee

ately winding a curl of his white hair around her finger, and began:

“Father, I am beginning to think that I do not have enough to occupy my mind. You see there are only two of us in the family, and you are so independent and strong in yourself”—arch hypocrite!—“that half the time I find myself twirling my thumbs in despair of my own indolence.”

The old pensioner looked pleased at this tribute, and replied with a gratified air, “Yes, dear, I have always made it a habit of life to depend on my own resources, though,” he added, magnanimously, as if not wishing to give pain, “you have been a good child, a good child.”

“And you know, father, that my old school-friend, Mrs. Judson, whose husband was killed three months after their marriage, died two weeks ago.”

“Dear me; yes, dear, of course,” nodded the old man, whose memory could go back thirty years, but not thirty days.

“And left a little boy, Archibald.”

Little Miss Dee

“Did she, indeed? Dear me! yes, of course.”

“All of which,” went on Agatha, very rapidly, “brings me to the point. I think I shall adopt that little boy.”

“Dear me! why yes, of course, why not?” asked her father, with a feeble conviction that he was expected to say something.

“Only, however, with your consent. You are so much more experienced and sagacious and prudent than I that I should not think of taking so important a step without consulting you, father dear.”

“Certainly not; dear me! I should say not; of course you wouldn’t,” replied the old man, and he looked astonished and indignant at the bare suggestion that anybody could even think of taking any sort of step without his opinion and sanction. And seeing that this well-directed shot was taking up his entire attention, she went on:

“I have been so troubled ever since you told me that you have abandoned all hope of fulfilling our family prophecy, and have

Little Miss Dee

put the burden and obligation on me. I know that I am not equal to it, and that no woman could possibly succeed where such strong and able men as we have had in our family have failed. And this is one of the overpowering reasons that have influenced me in my desire to adopt little Archibald. Suppose he comes to us and takes our name, as I shall certainly insist. He will grow up with a full knowledge of the prophecy, of the significance it carries to us, and with the understanding that he is the last of our race, and therefore the one upon whom everything depends. Perhaps we are taking an unfair advantage of the gypsy, but we have at least the consoling assurance that she will never know it."

"I don't know," said the old man, anxiously. "Dear me, I'm not so sure that it will work. For don't you see, he really doesn't belong to our family, and while we may resort to the stratagem, it cannot possibly fool the fates."

"We are not trying to fool anybody, father," said Agatha. "My point is that

Little Miss Dee

the language of the prophecy is so obscure that nobody can tell exactly what is meant. You yourself have believed that it is possible for me to be the 'hero' in spite of the masculine specification, and I cannot see why little Archibald will not be as much in line as a woman, even if he is our hero and savior by adoption."

The old man beamed. "It is an inspiration," he cried, "and we'll beat the gypsy yet, though I must confess the scheme looks a little underhanded and unworthy of the family of Dee. I don't believe our great ancestor Richard would have stood for it, and I am sure my cousin Calverley would have disapproved of it."

"Very likely, but you must understand, father, that times have changed and we cannot entirely shape our actions to suit the ethics of former generations. Moreover," she projected, shrewdly, "if our great ancestor and your cousin Calverley had shown themselves capable there would be no necessity of resorting to any unusual ways of saving the family reputation

Little Miss Dee

and getting rid of the gypsy for good and all."

"That's well put," said her father, "so you bring the boy over at once, and we'll lay the matter before him, and hear what he has to say."

"There's no great hurry about that," replied Agatha, with a laugh, "for as the boy is only eighteen months old, and as there are certain preliminaries of adoption, I am afraid we shall be obliged to give the law and nature a little leeway. But I am glad to see that your judgment favors my wish, for now I am sure I am making no mistake."

In this artful manner the young mistress of diplomacy carried the day, and in a short time Master Archibald Dee, born Judson, was duly installed in his new home and among his new responsibilities with due process of law and with the cordial assent of the interested community. He arrived, it happened, not any too soon, for the old pensioner, growing feebler every day, worn out by his wounds and his restless spirit,

Little Miss Dee

saw death, who could not conquer him at Palo Alto, approaching surely and irresistibly. And one night, when a violent storm was raging, he knew that the end was near, and he called to Agatha, and went over again the old story of the prophecy, as if its ringing had not been in her ears since childhood, and the hope that was in his heart showed itself in his shining face and his triumphant tone.

“It has come down to you and the boy, Agatha,” he said, “and something tells me that you will prove stronger than we have been. My life has been a rather sorry one, my dear, but when I am gone perhaps you will think that after all I did not have a fair chance. The same fate that decreed that I should be a soldier also willed that I should not reach the soldier’s ambition. And since all our fighting ancestors have failed as I have failed, why may we not believe that the battle-field is not to be the scene of the triumph of our family?”

Agatha’s arms were round the dying

Little Miss Dee

man, and his head was resting on her shoulder. When she tried to speak and her voice choked, he said: "Sometimes I have feared, Agatha, that you have not fully believed in the prophetic words of the gypsy, but you will believe, for it comes to us all in time. It may seem far off and weak and foolish now, but you will learn to know its truth as I know it. Fifteen generations are not easily deceived, my dear."

He asked her to bend a little lower, and he whispered: "Perhaps I have not been altogether just to you, Agatha. Perhaps I was wrong in permitting Herbert to go away and in rejoicing in his departure when I knew that you loved him. Don't judge me too harshly for that when I am gone, and when he comes back to you, tell him that at the last I was his friend and repented that I had not made you both as happy as you deserve. It was another of my mistakes, Agatha. Try to think of it only as a mistake."

That last night and the long months that

Little Miss Dee

had elapsed passed swiftly before Agatha as the old man spoke. She held him the more tenderly in her arms, and there were no tears in her eyes or in her voice as she answered: "It was right that it should be so, father. The mistake was ours, not yours. It is all over now, dear, and I am walking in a better light. When Herbert comes all will be as well as you could wish."

He was silent a moment and the storm rocked the house. He smiled, and said: "It was on a night like this that the greatest soldier of the world passed away at St. Helena. And what was my failure as compared with his? What was my Palo Alto to his Waterloo? I am dying, as Napoleon died, in a storm, and as a true soldier should wish to die, but he left everything behind him, while for me there is the joy of the triumph I feel is to come. His cause was hopelessly lost, and mine after all these centuries seems just beginning."

A little later he whispered: "Good by, dear. You are so strong and brave, and

Little Miss Dee

you have always been so good, so good. Don't forget."

The storm had passed, the old pensioner's last battle had been fought, and Little Miss Dee was alone in the world with her burden and her mission.

IN the serene consciousness of a duty to be performed Agatha Dee had accepted whatever adversity had come to her. Those of her neighbors who were chary of praise declared that it was her temperament which enabled her to bear with equanimity such sorrows as come to every life; others, a little more charitable, attributed her composure to a cheerful disposition, for the possession of which she deserved no special credit, for it is one of the small ironies of life that however much we may dispense happiness or gain friends, the guiding cause is promptly found in a dispensation of Providence for which we are personally entitled to no thanks whatever. It may be our good fortune to be temperamentally equable or by disposition cheerful, but it is through no exertion of ours, and as such demands no recognition. If Agatha Dee was a marvel of sweetness and duty, it was because she was born so. That

Little Miss Dee

point is invariably established by those who must have been born the other way.

Whatever the extent to which this question may have disturbed psychologists, it entered at no time into the calculations of Agatha, who went demurely about her every-day occupation, satisfied with the world as she found it, believing, as was the fact, that everybody was her friend, and that life at the longest could not be of sufficient length to repay the obligations of gratitude for the favors she received. That she was already passing from the bloom of early youth was to her a matter of trivial importance, and she concerned herself not at all as to the opinion the world might entertain of her relative position in spinsterhood. At an age when the conventional and commonplace maiden is hardly willing to confess that she is out of her 'teens, Agatha laughingly proclaimed that she was an old maid, and gloried in it. She gave many profound and convincing reasons why a state of singleness is much to be desired, and she had so fortified her-

Little Miss Dee

self with the names and deeds of illustrious women who spurned matrimony that had she chosen to take the rostrum as the champion of celibacy, he would have been skilled in debate, indeed, who could withstand her arguments.

That Agatha had very decided and pronounced principles in the matter of the scientific bringing up of children is not at all remarkable. In this respect she did not differ materially from other spinsters in general theory, however removed she may have been from them in the matter of practice. Agatha, if only to show her respect for her sex, permitted herself to be guided very indulgently by her emotions, but perhaps not so much as a vindication of the principle of woman's safe and superior intuitions as because it was the most natural, and therefore the most correct, thing. From her father she had inherited a martial spirit and a poetic and quixotic disposition, and from her mother a combination of those feminine inconsistencies and charms which softened and feminized the lion.

Little Miss Dee

The first dominant determination of this small woman was, that whatever else Archibald Dee might be, he should not be a milksop, and with this end in view she went fixedly to work to excite in the boy an appreciation of all that is heroic and virile. It was in the very nature of things that young Archibald, religiously and piously reared, knew his David and his Joshua and his Samson long before he mastered the biblical principles of the creation, and could swing a bat and master a horse with much more confidence than he could conjugate his verbs. It was Little Miss Dee's delight to induct him into the martial scenes of poetry, and it was a spectacle worth seeing when she stretched herself to the full limit of her five feet and four inches and thundered the valorous measures of the hero singers until he caught her spirit and the infection of her enthusiasm. Yet such is the delightful inconsistency of woman that she would go joyfully from the tented field and the warrior's camp to her flower garden and mourn

Little Miss Dee

over a withered rose or a broken tulip, and every maimed dog in the town came instinctively to her for kindness and sympathy when life had been a little too strenuous.

Public opinion differed as to the probable result of Little Miss Dee's experiment in adoptive maternity. The older generation of experienced mothers smiled tolerantly and agreed that it was interesting but dangerous, and that no woman could be reasonably expected to bring up a child that had not accrued to her by natural laws; the careful and conservative rector of the Episcopal Church, to which Agatha had given an early and loyal allegiance, hoped for the best in a properly conventional and non-committal way; the principal of the high school expressed the opinion that time would justify or disprove the value of the attempt, a brilliant argument which nobody made the slightest attempt to contradict; and the young women who constituted her school contemporaries declared that "Agatha always

Little Miss Dee

was queer." But the men in general stood up for her valiantly and asserted that the world would be a great deal better and happier world if every woman saw her duty so clearly and attended to it so closely.

In this pleasant and indulgent atmosphere of the old régime, tempered by such occasional whimsicalities as would naturally characterize feminine rule, Archibald Dee grew into young manhood. It was not her fault that his little mother and instructor did not fully understand a temperament differing distinctly from her own, and it was no fault of his that the whims and vagaries of the Dees sometimes bewildered and disconcerted him. From time to time the rector, the high school principal, the advanced mothers, and the seminary contemporaries would wait upon Agatha and assure her that the time had now arrived when the young fellow should be turned over to the care and guidance of a man; but Little Miss Dee merely replied that under the laws of the commonwealth, and according to the dictates of her conscience,

Little Miss Dee

she felt responsible for the well-being of the lad and would act accordingly. Whereupon the delegation or the individual would retire, astonished or in confusion, as the nature of the reproof demanded.

In addition to her father's transmission of valor and spirit, Agatha had inherited the paternal inability to manage finances, and by the time the young man had acquired a fair education at the schools of the town and was ready for college, alarming inroads had been made on the family purse. This condition did not in the least oppress our heroine, whose optimistic nature refused to be cast down by the ordinary trifles of finance, and whose cheerful conviction that the Lord would provide, if people only did their duty according to their lights, disarmed all criticism and silenced the tongues of warning. Agatha decreed that the boy should receive an education, whatever the cost, and having carefully and judiciously selected the institution of learning, she descended on the college town with her charge and exchanged opin-

Little Miss Dee

ions with the registrar concerning the correct trend of educational matters, making a few suggestions as to the best method of laying out the paths of knowledge. She saw her protégé safely established as a member of the freshman class, and during the year, and in fact all through the college course, she appeared frequently on the scene of action in order to provide against emergencies which she feared might arise through reason of her absence.

It never occurred to Archibald that this solicitude on the part of the little mother was in any way a reflection on his manliness or ability to take care of himself. A strapping young fellow, six feet in his stockings, is more likely to be amused than disconcerted by the spectacle of a rather small woman exercising herself in his behalf. Moreover, Archibald had been so accustomed since infancy to these feminine ministrations that he accepted them as a necessary detail of his existence, which would be quite another thing if attempted by any other woman not clothed with the

Little Miss Dee

proper authority. And, to do her justice, Agatha herself would have been the first to resent any imputation as to Archibald's self-reliance. She gloried rather more in his athletic prowess than in the satisfactory advance he made in his studies, and his elevation to his class, and subsequently to the university, boat was a memorable achievement to the daughter of the old soldier.

Meanwhile the financial agent who was intrusted with the disagreeable responsibility of looking after the vanishing estate, felt the necessity of informing Agatha that the expense of luxuriating in the possession of an adopted son, whose tastes were not remarkable for simplicity, was gradually undermining the financial fabric of the family. To this she replied that, while she recognized the danger incurred, she had undertaken a solemn mission, and it was too late to be deterred by trifles. Just before his graduation day she had conferred with Archibald concerning his choice of a sphere of usefulness, and had learned from

Little Miss Dee

him that, while in common with most of the young men of his set, he had no special leanings toward labor, the law afforded a sort of gentlemanly recreation and dignified employment of such hours as must be necessarily devoted, for form's sake, to the appearance of business. This inclination necessitated a course in the law school, and two more years of college life, and when at last Archibald passed his examinations very creditably, and said farewell temporarily to his classmates, he quite agreed with Agatha that there was no longer any excuse for putting off the evil hour of going to work. Then Agatha, who had mapped out a programme, with no intention of deviating from it, announced her decision.

“My dear Archibald,” she said, “we are both fully aware that it is quite impossible that a man of your education and talents should bury himself in this little town. I have heard my father say a hundred times that if he had not made the mistake of settling down in a village, in-

Little Miss Dee

stead of going at once to the city, he would have accomplished much more in life. You have heard the story of our family prophecy, and you know how little importance I attach to it; still it is true that there is no wisdom in shutting one's eyes to all the possibilities, and if it is decreed that you are to be famous, it is our duty to help along fate to the best of our ability. I have made arrangements which provide that you shall enter a law office, and I have also arranged to accompany you—not because you really need me in the promotion of your fortune, my dear boy, but because I fear you will be lonely in that great wilderness of souls.”

Whereupon Little Miss Dee stood up on tip-toe and kissed him, and Archibald, who was at heart not an unappreciative fellow, and who had a genuine affection for his little mother, returned the salutation with warmth. He might have explained that so far as loneliness goes, he felt capable of passing the dreary hours in the city without an excess of sadness, but he was truly

Little Miss Dee

devoted to his protector, though naturally in a somewhat selfish way, and he was touched by her unremitting love. So Agatha interviewed her man of business, arranged the details of her now meager income, put a placard in the front parlor window announcing a house for rent, and departed for the city, carrying Archibald with her, meek and unresisting.

IT was quite in line with the rules of procedure that, once in the city, Little Miss Dee should busy herself with the arrangements for living, first having introduced Archibald to the gentlemen whose office he was to adorn, and whose clients he was to favor with his knowledge. Very felicitously it had happened that Mr. Faxon, of the well-known firm of Claxton, Faxon & Brent, had remembered Agatha as the distant connection of his mother, who was a Calverley, and had gladly acceded to her request that Archibald should be associated with him and his partners. Then Agatha proceeded to hunt up a boarding-house with comforts agreeable to her income. Such an abode she found without great difficulty, and when she had installed Archibald on the second floor, she took to herself a little room at the top of the house, where, as she craftily explained, she could look out on the lake, get plenty of

Little Miss Dee

light and air, and be perfectly secure against intrusion when she desired to be alone. In these arrangements Archibald acquiesced with his customary good nature, and doubtless it never occurred to him that the old maid's action was a mere subterfuge, and that in her unselfishness she thought only of his comfort. "We shall be so happy here, my dear boy," she cried, with well-simulated enthusiasm. "I have always been fond of water views, and it will be a real luxury to have a room where I can feast my eyes perpetually on this beautiful lake." And then she would crawl up four flights of stairs to her cramped room, and if an occasional sigh came from that generous heart as she thought of her comfortable home in the little distant town, she bravely checked it and reproached herself for such wicked thoughts.

"Don't you tell me, Sarah Parsons," she said one day, "there is no use in denying that the longer we live the more and more selfish we get. It is astonishing how such things grow on us. I can re-

Little Miss Dee

member how, when I was young, it was no trouble at all to give up the trifles that now seem indispensable. It really worries me to think what an intolerable creature I shall be when I am old." And she sighed at the prospect.

"Humph!" said Miss Parsons.

Sarah Parsons was an interesting study in human phenomena. She had come from New England many years before to teach school, and possessing a melancholy disposition, which led her to shun the haunts of convivial people, with a frugal nature, which enabled her to accumulate a little sum of money against the coming of a rainy day, she had measurably retired from the world to the sanctity of Mrs. Braidwood's refined boarding-house. Miss Parsons's melancholia seemed to expand with years, and it was currently reported among the boarders that she absolutely reveled in grief. In her room on the third floor, which was most austere furnished, she kept a small and lugubrious library of works pertaining to the advanced stage of

Little Miss Dee

human misery; she rarely smiled, and when at times her features did relax, the contortions of her features from long disuse seemed to express something between a grimace and a frown, and greatly terrified those unacquainted with this exhibition of emotion.

Miss Parsons and Little Miss Dee had met early in the schoolmistress's professional career, when she had taught two terms in the district school of the country town, and the profound solemnity of the one had excited the sympathetic consideration of the other, with the result that while intimacy was barred by Puritan hauteur a certain amicable understanding existed which passed for friendship. Agatha was therefore both surprised and pleased when she found her old acquaintance at the abiding place she had selected, and greeted her with affectionate protestations, assurances which Miss Parsons received with sadness, but with the correct deportment she had always impressed on the young ladies under her charge.

Little Miss Dee

From all this it may be gathered that when Sarah Parsons said "Humph," it was more with an inflection of dejection than of scorn, and that there was no sinister intimation of doubt on her part as to Miss Dee's deductions so unflattering to herself. "We naturally become infirm as we grow older," she replied, mournfully.

"Still," said Agatha, "we are not so old after all; there is some consoling thought in that. And perhaps by watching ourselves and trying to curb unreasonable desires it may not be so bad as we think."

"Whatever is to be will be," interposed Miss Parsons, sepulchrally, "but we need not try to make ourselves any more miserable than we are, for things are sure to be bad enough at the best. Mrs. Braidwood was foolish enough to tell me yesterday that I should look on the bright side of life, just as if it would do any good to look on any side of life. We can't help matters by looking, can we?"

"Sometimes we can help them by look-

Little Miss Dee

ing pleasant," suggested the optimistic Agatha.

"I am not at all sure of that," replied Miss Parsons, "but suppose you do look pleasant when you are not feeling pleasant; isn't that an intentional deceit? How can you reconcile it to your conscience?"

"Perhaps," said Agatha, laughingly, "because I have just a plain, ordinary conscience, and not the New England variety, which seems to be particularly troublesome."

Miss Parsons looked grieved, for it struck her very forcibly that there was a suggestion of flippancy in Agatha's tone, inexcusable in a discussion involving such a sacred combination as New England and conscience. "I think we would better drop the subject," she said, sadly. As a schoolmistress Miss Parsons regarded it a sacred obligation to sustain the grammatical tone of the Braidwood house by saying "would better" to the indignation of the assembled company.

However solicitous Little Miss Dee may

Little Miss Dee

have been concerning Archibald's business and social prospects, they gave the young gentleman himself the least possible annoyance. His natural brightness and a fair degree of diligence combined to make him useful to his employers, and they hinted that a partnership was not one of the improbabilities of the future. His prominence in the athletic department of university life, his wide acquaintance with college men, and an unmistakable charm of manner quickly brought him the necessary social introduction, and altogether the little mother had every apparent reason to be proud of her training and of the growing importance of her charge.

"What do you think?" she asked, triumphantly of Miss Parsons. "What do you think, Sarah? Archie has been elected a member of the University Club!"

This thunderbolt did not have the effect expected; Miss Parsons appeared on the verge of tears. "I hope you are not thinking of letting him do it, Agatha," she answered.

Little Miss Dee

“Not let him do it? Did you ever stop to reflect what an honor this is? Perhaps you do not know, but Archie tells me that there are scores of prominent men on the waiting list, and that they preferred him to some of the brightest fellows in town. It’s the opportunity of a lifetime, and Archie says that if he lets this chance go by he may never get another.”

“All the better for him if he doesn’t,” sighed Miss Parsons. “I knew a young man back East who was one of the nicest, most orderly, well-behaved fellows in the village. He went off to the city, joined one of these drinking and carousing clubs, and I never did know what became of him.”

“Well, if you never knew what became of him,” interjected Agatha, soothingly, “why spend your time worrying about him, or presuming that he went to the bad? For all you know he may be doing missionary work this very minute in some foreign land. Think of the hundreds of missionaries we never hear about.”

Little Miss Dee

"It's far more likely that he's doing time at some penal institution," retorted Miss Parsons, rather sourly. "Guess you never knew Harry Cole. If he's doing missionary work, I'm mighty sorry for the heathen; that's all I've got to say about him."

"I understood you to say that he was a nice, orderly young man," said Agatha, innocently.

"And so he was before he joined that club. I know just as well as I know my name, Agatha Dee, that the club ruined him. You mark my words, you'll be sorry you ever let Archibald put his foot in that gilded den of vice."

"Whatever it may be, it is hardly a gilded den," replied Agatha, thoughtfully. "I passed it to-day, and I thought it looked particularly shabby. The front steps certainly needed cleaning, and the curtains were a sight. After Archie becomes a member I am going to insist that the necessary improvements are made; at least I shall see to it that the place is cleaned up."

Little Miss Dee

I should be mortified to death if any of the folks at home saw the condition of the building and knew that Archie visited it."

And so it came about that Archibald Dee, general good fellow and social favorite, became a clubman in high standing. The problem of the payment of the initiation fee was quickly solved, as the young gentleman knew it would be, by further evidences of cheerful willingness on the part of Agatha. "For, hang it all," he explained, "I have had so many calls on me for obligations which my prospects demand, that unless I am helped out this time I shall certainly never make the club." And Agatha, who could see nothing short of a triumphant march to all sorts of imperishable fame, so far as Archibald was concerned, schemed and manœuvered and gave up various plans for the renovation of the country home that the grander achievement might be attained. Her reward was a kiss airily planted fairly on the forehead and a little above the parting of the eye-

Little Miss Dee

brows, and what compensation is equal to that in the estimation of a doting mother?

The home life of the Dees at this particular crisis in the worldly affairs of Archibald was in no danger of becoming monotonous, for despite the allurements of Mrs. Braidwood's hospitality, and the circle of agreeable and diversified citizens who composed her household, Archibald found his pleasures elsewhere. The demands on his time and his presence, as he fully explained, were such that he could not afford to ignore them. "You can understand," he said to Agatha, when in the gentlest way she complained that she had not seen him for five days, "that a man has his way to make in the world, and he must take advantage of every opportunity. These people here in the house," he added, "are all well enough, I dare say, but it would be a criminal waste of my time to hang about with them."

"You needn't necessarily be with them," suggested Agatha; "you might stay home

Little Miss Dee

occasionally and read, or hang about, as you call it, with me."

"You forget, my dear mother," said Archibald, with an injured air, "that when a man has been shut up in a law office all day he has very little inclination to put in his evenings in a library. A fellow must have some recreation, and what is more to the point, I am building up a circle of acquaintances that will be extremely useful to me. I am surprised that a woman of your experience and far-sightedness does not see this at once."

After this convincing argument Miss Dee retired without further expostulation, while Archibald, having put on his evening clothes, went forth to that recreation so indispensable to a rising man of business. It never seemingly occurred to either that they might have pleasures abroad in common, and Agatha looked on Archibald's acquaintances of both sexes as necessary evils, which the poor boy endured only for the purpose of advancing his interests. She piously thanked heaven that she was

Little Miss Dee

not a man and compelled to work so hard for a position in the world, and often, when the masculine sufferer had hurried away after dinner, or sent word that he was dining out, she would tap on Miss Parsons's door and commune with that gloomy lady in deprecation of the hard lot of man.

But Miss Parsons was not a human fount of consolation, and at several pliant moments she did not fail to tell her friend her unbiased opinion of Archibald's attitude, a burst of confidence that would have been painful if the lady's melancholy nature had not immediately led her off into generalities associated with her early observation of the human family. "Men are pretty much alike," she maintained. "The more you do for them the more you may do, and the quicker it's done the sooner you have the opportunity of doing something else"—thereby adding strength and pith to an ancient saying.

"It is a pleasure to do for those we love," said Agatha, gently.

Little Miss Dee

“Pish!” retorted Miss Parsons.

One afternoon Agatha came home with a guilty look on her face, which showed itself very plainly, notwithstanding the unusual brightness of her eyes and the excitement of her manner. Miss Parsons may not have been the only one to note it, but she was the first to take the culprit aside and speak of it. “Agatha Dee,” she said, “you have been doing something uncommon. I hope it is nothing you are ashamed of.”

“Sarah,” replied the suspected one, “I have been doing something uncommon, and I can’t quite decide whether I am ashamed or glad of it. The fact is, that I felt sort of depressed and out of sorts this afternoon, and when temptation came, the first thing I knew I had yielded to it. To make a long story short, and a bad matter no worse, I went to the theater.”

“I do not go to theaters,” suggested Miss Parsons, severely.

“You do not do a good many things that I do,” said Agatha, with a self-accusing

Little Miss Dee

sigh, "though I dare say it is greatly to your credit; but you stay away from the playhouse because you conscientiously disapprove of gayety and excitement, while I do not go as often as I wish because it seems an awful waste of money which we need for more important things. This afternoon the allurements were too strong for me. I was passing the theater and I saw that *Monte Cristo* was the bill of the play, and when I looked at the pictures—well, it was a bargain matinee, and I went in."

"If the play is anything like the book," answered Miss Parsons, shortly, "I have no desire to see it. It always seemed to me a very cheap story of impossible adventure."

"Ah," cried Agatha, "that is because you have no blood of soldiers in your veins, Sarah Parsons," and her eyes kindled and a flush of enthusiasm came to her face. "You have never heard the roar of battle, the booming of cannon, the shouts of victory."

Little Miss Dee

"No, I haven't, I'll admit," snapped the precise Sarah, "have you?"

"Why of course not; what a ridiculous question. But you know my father was a soldier, and he has told me about it so many times that it often seems that I must have been in battle. Mother used to say that all my nightmares took the form of war, and that pleased father immensely. Dear father! I thought of him all the time I was looking at Edmond Dantes. He would have been just such a man if he had had a chance. But father had only one chance, and before he could improve it he went down with a bullet in each leg. Sometimes I wish that Archie could have been a soldier instead of a lawyer, and then I think of poor father, with the doctors probing for bullets every year or two, and I conclude that after all it may be for the best. War is full of dangers."

"So are clubs," put in the sententious Sarah. "The difference is," she added, dejectedly, "that war destroys the body, while clubs imperil the soul."

Little Miss Dee

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way, Sarah Parsons," replied Agatha, "and least of all just now, for Archie has joined what they call a country club, and I should be terribly unhappy if I really believed that I have permitted him to do anything that is going to affect him spiritually."

"I don't know anything about country clubs, and I don't care to," answered Miss Parsons, "but you may depend on it they are just as bad as the rest, and productive of just as much misery."

"Then I should think you would stand up for them," retorted Agatha, a little spitefully, but in a breath she had repented and went on: "Archie has so few amusements, poor boy, and he is shut up down town all day long, that it seems cruel to deprive him of the occasional breaths of fresh air he is able to get out in the country. You don't know how mean I felt all the afternoon at the theater where I was selfishly enjoying myself while he was slaving at his desk. It is true, after all, that we women never stop to think how hard

Little Miss Dee

men work. The least we can do is to gratify their reasonable tastes whenever the opportunity offers."

"Nonsense!" said the unsympathetic Miss Parsons, but Agatha went back to her room unconvinced and unconvincing.

So far as the testimony of the world could go there was ample reason for Agatha's pride in Archibald Dee. His associates in the law firm of Claxton, Faxon & Brent, with the assurance that he would be soon admitted to partnership, felt no hesitation in asserting that no more promising young fellow could be found in the city's professional life. The men about town and at the club spoke of him with the utmost enthusiasm, and the young women agreed, with a remarkable degree of feminine unanimity, that no such distinct addition to the society set had happened along in several years. The expression "happened along" was used advisedly, for it was one of the interesting features of the society of this western metropolis that society, as so distinguished, was conducted

Little Miss Dee

very entertainingly along lines of chance. Matrons with marriageable daughters looked kindly on the young man, notwithstanding his slender purse, and it was said by his companions, more in congratulation and admiration than in envy, that Dee could have his pick of a dozen heiresses. In fairness to Archibald it must be said that he wore these blushing honors with unaffected modesty, and did not even discuss his brilliant matrimonial prospects with Agatha, who, moving in a different set, or strictly speaking, no set at all, had little conception of the staggering possibilities open to her adopted son.

If Archibald Dee seemed to show a lack of consideration for his little mother, it was more from the excess of maternal devotion than from his natural impulses. Had he been accused of selfishness nobody would have been more surprised and deeply grieved than he. Having been accustomed all his life to this unwearying attention, he had come to think that it was part of a young man's natural equipment, and merely

Little Miss Dee

that which any one has a right to look for from those who have been responsible for his education and bringing up. He would have declared at once that he was on a common footing with other fellows of his set, receiving neither more nor less than his share of family favors. He did not, it is true, go into the matter very deeply, but it would be hardly fair to expect a young man to take a post-graduate course in filial ethics when he has not had even elementary instruction. He always spoke deferentially, even affectionately, of Agatha, and when the elderly ladies of his special circles said, very politely and very meaninglessly, that they would be charmed to meet her whenever the opportunity presented, he thanked them warmly for their friendly interest and the matter was dropped.

Not that it ever occurred to Agatha Dee that it was her right far more than her privilege to be seen in the high places where this young man chose to disport himself. So far as Archibald was con-

Little Miss Dee

cerned she had most hazy ideas of the precise line of distinction between right and privilege, for self-analysis was not one of her accomplishments. Keen as she was to see the virtue and good of others, shrewdly noting, if at once forgiving, their faults, she knew nothing of herself, and was worried only with the imaginary failings, which she declared it must be her constant duty to try to mend. And so she went along from day to day, patient, hopeful, strong in all that is unselfish and sacrificing, and weak only in the passionate love that makes idolatry of maternity.

LITTLE MISS DEE'S "city house," as she humorously called it in contradistinction to her "country place," was the rather small apartment at the top of Mrs. Braidwood's home for a few congenial people. While at the back of the building, and at the end of a long and not particularly inviting hall, it had its advantages of location, for the two narrow windows looked out on the great expanse of lake hardly a city block away. Along the window ledges Agatha had planted flower-boxes, in order, as she said, that she might have something to remind her of the old home on the river bank, and these she had filled with geraniums and begonias, petunias and daisies, hung around with vinca, salvia, and ivy, all in riotous profusion, as is the glory of the garden of the old-fashioned sort.

Regularity and system in her personal and domestic arrangements had never been

Little Miss Dee

a severe course in Agatha's early training, and the little woman frankly admitted that the room usually looked as if it had just suffered from a passing tornado. Once every week, perhaps spurred on by the horror-stricken Miss Parsons, whose New England thrift revolted at such an exhibition of carelessness, the occupant would diligently go to work for a general cleaning and fixing, and one hour thereafter the figurative storm clouds would gather, the whirlwind would come rushing down, and the artistic disarray would be again complete. "After all," said the hopeless one philosophically, "it is much better as it is, for I have noticed that the persons who suffer most severely from burglars are always those who keep their valuables in some convenient place where they can be most easily found. Now, if it takes me fifteen minutes to find anything, how much longer would it worry a burglar who has not even my knowledge of localities to guide him, and by the time he has made any important discoveries, the chances are

Little Miss Dee

that the whole house would be alarmed and his capture would be certain. My room may not be so pretty to look at, but the rest of the people in the building could afford to pay me liberally for the idea; it is such a perfect trap."

Thus amiably discussing her benefits to her neighbors, she would complete her personal arrangements, give one half-pleased, half-disgusted glance at her room, and depart for her one consistent dissipation, a tramp through the flower garden in the park. There was something in the disorder and recklessness of color in the old garden, mercifully spared from the horrors of horticultural geometrics, that called back the home in the little country town, and while Agatha wandered at will among the hollyhocks and dahlias and poppies and asters, it seemed to her that she was no longer near the grime and smoke and roar of a great, heartless city, but had gone back to the quiet beauty and restfulness of her childhood; that she was once more in the garden that overlooked the river, with

Little Miss Dee

the rolling prairies stretching far into the purple distance, and the lazy life of a dreamer fed and fostered by the gentle picture. Then she would go to her favorite bench where the hollyhocks were the proudest and most luxuriant, and would sit an hour or more with her thoughts still in the past, wondering if the old life were not after all the sweetest, and if even the daughter of a soldier, with a prophecy and a mission unfulfilled, could find real happiness in the quest of the hitherto unattainable.

There was apparently no reason why a demure little old maid, sitting quietly on a rustic bench, absorbed in her own reflections, and giving no indications of a desire to make acquaintances, should have attracted attention, and it was therefore a suspicious circumstance that a gentleman had passed and repassed three and even four times, curiously eying Agatha, all unconscious of the interest she had excited. That he was at least externally a gentleman there was every indication, and that with all his curiosity he seemed to shrink from

Little Miss Dee

any impertinent intrusion was another assuring sign. He was a man well along in middle life, rather good looking as men go, correctly but not too fashionably dressed, and altogether the sort of man that appeared to have himself in good control. It was not until Agatha, still unaware of his presence, looked up that he stepped forward, hesitated, and then said, apologetically:

“I beg your pardon, madam; I could almost believe—I am quite sure—yes, it is Agatha Dee!”

Agatha was staring at him helplessly. She had recognized the voice at the first word, and it all seemed so in harmony with the thoughts that had carried her back more than a score of years. The last time she had seen this man she had sat on this very spot—no, in the old garden which it recalled, and they had talked together of his life, of their life, which was to be one and the same. This was the man who was coming back for her when the hour of emancipation should arrive, and who long

Little Miss Dee

before that hour had forgotten both her and the promise. Memories such as that do not die, Agatha Dee, even if the pain at the heart has stopped, and the haze of time has softened the impression.

When she did not speak he thought that she did not remember him, and he came a little nearer, and began: "I am sorry that you have forgotten me. I am—"

"Herbert Ainslie," she said, very quietly, and if any emotion had possessed her, it had passed when she spoke. "You see I have not forgotten you." And then, with a little smile that was reassuring, "I knew you even before I saw you closely. Voices do not change so easily."

"I shall not ask you to say anything more complimentary than that," he replied, good-humoredly, and he stopped abruptly and held out his hand. She put out her own, and as their hands met they looked into each other's eyes, and, incomprehensibly enough, both laughed.

"You have just come to the city?" he asked.

Little Miss Dee

“I have lived here a year.”

“And have never let me know it?”

“How long have you lived here?”

“Nearly thirty years, alas!”

“And have never let me know it?”

He did not laugh at this, for he felt the subtle reproach in her tone, though there was no resentment in her frank, open eyes. “I hardly know what to say to that,” he said, honestly; “it is so much like going back into some other world, into another life, that after all these years is more of a dream than a reality. May I share this bench with you, and will you give me just a minute to pull myself together? A chain that has been broken so long cannot be fitted at once with the right link.”

His manner was so gentle and his tone so soft that Agatha could not see in him the impetuous, exacting boy who was the hero of her girlhood fancy. She was touched quite as much by the sincerity of his manner as by the simplicity of his words, and she said, involuntarily, “You have had trouble?”

Little Miss Dee

He smiled at this as he sat down. "I suppose trouble comes to us all at one time or another, Agatha—may I call you Agatha?—but my troubles have not been serious or lasting. Shall I tell you the short story of my humdrum life? Possibly you know it already."

"Only so much as you have communicated to me from time to time."

"This is my punishment," he answered, smiling back at her; "but I know from your manner that if my misdemeanors are not forgotten they are at least forgiven."

"I was just wondering," she interrupted, "what particular crimes you men include under the head of misdemeanors, and whether they are listed in the litany."

"At least," he said, with the same gentleness of voice, "we may hope that they are always barred by the statute of limitations—and by repentance. If the quality of feminine mercy is to be strained, what hope for any of us? I never was cut out for a hero, Agatha, and worse than that, I seem always to have fought a losing

Little Miss Dee

fight against myself. Perhaps it was the triumph of mammon over a better spirit, or possibly I left the country town too soon."

This was getting on dangerous ground, and Agatha dexterously interposed. "At last we have found the missing link, and you are leaving the old home. What next?"

So he went on to tell her of his early struggles in the city, how he had begun his uphill fight with the one end in view, the accumulation of a fortune. Incidentally to this he had married, luckily the world said, happily his own domestic relations proved. No great riches had come to him, but he had been successful as a reasonable man might wish. For five years he had been a widower, for half that time out of active business, with only himself to provide for and only his own pleasures to consult. Not a very heroic life he admitted, but a clean one, and not wholly unprofitable. He had endowed no universities, founded no hospitals, and made no large public donations,

Little Miss Dee

but he was not altogether sordid, and he added, half jestingly, he was earnestly trying to live down all errors and crimes of the past. "So much for my unprofitable story," he concluded; "now what of yourself?"

"A far less interesting recital than your own. Nothing has ever happened to me. You know nothing ever does happen to our family. Father used to say that it is the curse of the prophecy, and I dare say he was right."

"Yes, I remember the prophecy, and a particularly flattering one it was. By the way, who is attending to that branch of the family duty just now?"

"My boy."

"Your boy?" Ainslie's voice betrayed his surprise at this intelligence. "O, I see. I had forgotten for the moment how time has flown, and that you have a boy. And-d-d, your husband?—I trust—he is well?"

"I hope he is, especially if I am to see him very soon. I had also forgotten that

Little Miss Dee

you are not familiar with your old home and its doings. You did not pay us the honor of a visit, I believe.”

Ainslie shook his head, and said, gravely: “That is a sore point with me. For several years I was ashamed to go home, for I felt that I had not progressed enough to warrant it. Then—but you know how it is—new scenes, new people—”

“And old friends forgotten,” interjected Agatha, gently. “Yes, I know how it is; but,” she added, as if to check the protest that came to his lips, “you must let me finish my story. My boy is my adopted son. I have never married. In fact, I may have come to the conclusion that it is much easier to look after an adopted son than a husband. The rest of the story is short. We came to the city, and are living at Mrs. Braidwood’s. Archibald is in the law office of Claxton, Faxon & Brent, and is to be taken into the firm shortly.”

“I know the firm, and I know the Braidwood house. In fact, I have often called there. When I came to town Tom Braid-

Little Miss Dee

wood was one of our most successful business men. I hope there is no reason why I may not call again, and very soon."

Agatha smiled, and said as she rose from the bench: "I have no doubt that your old friend, Tom's wife, will be delighted to see you, and for my part, I shall always consider it a pleasure."

"Then why do you smile?" he asked, a little brusquely.

"Because, Herbert—you see that I am calling you Herbert, just for old time's sake—because you have, as I remember, such a queer idea of time. The last time you said you were coming to see me you decided to wait twenty-five years, and you will forgive me if I fear that we should be waiting still were it not that we happen to be particularly fond of flowers and of a morning walk in the park."

They were going slowly through the entrance of the garden, and Herbert Ainslie was now in a mood to magnify his own transgressions. "I may have a bad memory, Agatha," he said, "but I heartily

Little Miss Dee

wish I could forget some of the things that will always trouble me. Let me be frank, for we have known each other well enough to speak without hesitation. Your whole manner tells me that you are happy, and that nothing has left a cloud on your life. I am not foolish enough to fancy that any little folly of mine has had the slightest effect on your attitude toward the world, but I am old enough to know that young men often do caddish things through pure thoughtlessness, and it was my misfortune, or my crime, to deserve the adjective."

The woman felt her heart beat faster as he spoke, and she answered, softly: "Whatever misfortunes—not crimes—we may have endured in the past, rest assured they have been long since forgotten. You are right when you say that I am happy, for everything has conspired to bring me happiness, and even those things which at the time we hope we may forget might add to our happiness as a memory of the past."

"Then," he said, rather precipitately, "our own past may be a happy memory."

Little Miss Dee

She blushed at this. "That is hardly fair to me, for you are drawing a special conclusion from a general statement." She hesitated and turned and looked at him with frank, honest eyes. "You said that we have known each other well enough to speak plainly. I have often wondered how I should feel and act if fate should throw us together as fate has done. It is easier for me than I believed possible, so you see that the past, if not utterly forgotten, is remembered only as an incident that leaves no pain."

Ainslie shrugged his shoulders. The quick workings of the feminine mind were too confusing for his slower reasoning. Of a naturally sentimental disposition, he had been stirred to pleasant fancies by the meeting with his youthful ideal, and while he was perfectly honest in his self-accusation, it did not gratify his vanity that his expressed wish should be so cordially granted. "Very likely I have exaggerated my own sins, which may be merely another way of magnifying my own importance,"

Little Miss Dee

he said. "And now?" he added, with an attempt at a smile.

"And now," she smiled back, "I am going to take this car."

He signaled to the car, then said, a little quizzically, "Please do not forget to tell Mrs. Braidwood that in spite of my distinguished reputation for forgetfulness, I shall give myself the honor of calling very soon."

Something in his voice smote Agatha with reproach, and impulsively she held out her hand. "Don't misunderstand me, Herbert," she said, almost appealingly. "I, too, shall be glad to see you."

"Even if I speak of the old days?"

"Even if we both speak of the old days."

And Agatha, though she smiled as she repeated his words, as if in jest, had no sooner seated herself in the car and waved farewell, than she felt an unaccountable fluttering, and a lump rose in her throat, and two particularly obtrusive tears came to her eyes, and when she reached her room and had securely locked herself in,

Little Miss Dee

she gave herself over to one of those weeping spells which are specially designed for the relief of the overcharged feminine bosom—all very mysterious and inexplicable. But when she had cried herself out, and had composed herself for the evening, she took advantage of Archibald's presence to inquire, quite casually, "Archie, did you ever at the office or the club run across a gentleman of the name of Ainslie?"

And Archibald stopped superintending the rearrangement of his tie to ask, "Ainslie? Is he a queer old chap, rather stiff in his dress and formal in his manner?"

"Well," replied Agatha, not recognizing the description of the man who had seemed to her notably elegant, "he is certainly not old, and I don't think I should call him queer. But he may be a little precise."

"Rather stilted in his talk, and very ceremonious?"

"Perhaps," said Agatha, doubtfully.

"There is such a man who comes to the office," went on Archibald; "I believe he

Little Miss Dee

is a retired capitalist, or something of that sort, at least he never seems to be pressed for time. Do you know him?"

"Yes—that is—at least—I did know a man who partly answers your description. Herbert Ainslie was his name. He lived in our town many years ago."

"Herbert Ainslie? That's the man. And he may be a man worth knowing, for he's as rich as a Jew."

"O," said Agatha.

TO those who were in Mr. Archibald Dee's confidence, or were well versed in the symptoms of the most common of human failings, it had been known for some time that the young gentleman was wrestling with an acutely sentimental passion. He was too well balanced to permit this affliction to interfere with his regular line of duties, and he was too self-contained to allow his infirmity to lead him into foolish and ridiculous excesses of dress or demeanor, but it was not to be denied that he who could have presumably his choice of available maidens in the market, had succumbed at last, and without premeditation. Much speculation followed the first rumors touching the happy object of Mr. Dee's fancy. Could it be Miss Sophie Ingold, whose father had accumulated in trade a sufficient counter-irritant for Miss Sophie's unquestioned lack of physical charms? Or Miss Mabel Ormsby,

Little Miss Dee

very pretty and discouragingly poor? Or Miss Willie Whiteley, tall, stately, and forbiddingly intellectual? Or Miss Cassie Winthrop, whose beautiful voice would have enriched a church choir had she been sufficiently spiritual, and had not her social position absolutely prohibited?

In turn, and with an undertone of sadness, these agreeable and eligible young women positively denied the accusation, but all protestations were futile, until, to relieve the public mind, and possibly to remove the suspicion that the young ladies under fire could by any chance achieve so glorious a distinction, Miss Luella Blatchford admitted that she was the favored goddess. Miss Blatchford was not a prime favorite in the exclusive circles in which she and Archibald Dee moved, and the announcement, corroborated by the gentleman, that she had captured the lion of the winter, was received with many expressions of dissatisfaction when the lion and Miss Blatchford were not present. It was remarked by Miss Blatchford's feminine

Little Miss Dee

companions, regretfully of course, that her temper was uncertain; that she was bold and forward; that her manner was cold and haughty; and that she had no larger share of good looks than is reasonably allowed by law. All of which must have been measurably true, as the allegations were never specifically denied, and as it was currently reported that when Mr. Dee asked her father for the young woman's hand, that bestower of the blessing betrayed unmistakable emotions of astonishment.

The conscientious novelist or chronicler of human history is never so foolish as to try to explain why young people fall in love one with another, or to account for the vagaries of the human passion, which seem so ill in accord with reasonable expectations. It probably never will be known why Mr. Archibald Dee was attracted to Miss Luella Blatchford, and why, though once attracted, he remained faithful to that young woman. But it may be pointed out that while Miss Blatchford's temper was

Little Miss Dee

uncertain her fortune was not, for she had been provided with an independent income by a thoughtful relative—not large enough happily to bring to her accepted lover the charge of fortune hunting, but sufficiently comfortable to assist a young and ambitious lawyer when his clients were slow in payments. Notwithstanding the invidious comments of her women friends, Miss Blatchford was not without physical attractions, with a face of which the beauty was lessened by a somewhat scornful expression quite in keeping with her nature. The Blatchfords lived in a fashionable quarter of the city, and fully sustained the reputation so proudly earned by the first families.

Congratulations had been offered for several days in exclusive circles before Archibald confided to Little Miss Dee the secret of his great happiness. Up to this time Agatha's acquaintance with the Blatchfords and others of that awe-inspiring set had been confined to occasional perusal of the society columns of the daily papers, but while she knew that such an

Little Miss Dee

alliance, so far as outward appearances go, was much to be desired, it could not occur to her that any young woman would not be a distinct gainer by a marriage with Archibald Dee. It was true that there was no blood of the Dees or of the Calverleys in his veins, but he was indorsed by and responsible to both those illustrious families, and that was sufficient assurance for the most exacting. Agatha Dee was a paradox in the social relation. She who was all humility and gentleness to every one with whom she came in contact was easily stirred by the discussion of family greatness, and appreciated to the last degree the importance of old and aristocratic family connection. At times she would deplore this satisfaction as an inherited failing, and again she would be thankful that whatever reverses might come, nothing could rob her of the pride of ancestry. She was in this self-congratulatory frame of mind when she sought out the faithful Miss Parsons and announced her intention of making an immediate call on Miss Blatchford.

Little Miss Dee

"I don't think I'd do that," said Miss Parsons, cautiously.

"And why not?" demanded Agatha.

"Well, in the first place, you have never met her."

"Which is a very good reason why I am going to meet her. How can we ever meet unless we make some effort?"

"But you know she belongs to a very superior family."

"Of course she does," Agatha answered, proudly. "If she did not how could she expect to interest Archie? But you know, Sarah Parsons, and it seems unnecessary to say it, we belong to a superior family too, and after all there is a good old saying down home that 'folks is folks.'"

"Yes, I know, but that's down home, and such sayings are not always accepted in the city. Here there are folks and folks."

The puzzled look on Agatha's face showed that she did not clearly comprehend. "I must admit, Sarah Parsons," she said, "that I do not exactly grasp your

Little Miss Dee

meaning, but I am not going to be deficient in my duty, as I see it, and if I do not call on Miss Blatchford it is very likely that she will think I am unfriendly or opposing her marriage, and you know," she added, gently, "I would not for the world give her a moment's sorrow or uneasiness."

"Perhaps," suggested Miss Parsons, diplomatically, "it would be better for you to allow the young woman to call on you. It seems to me that this would be much the more dignified and proper way."

"It would," replied Agatha, "if I were foolish enough to stand on formality and inexcusable pride, but it may be that she is very busy, while I have plenty of time, and more than that I have a natural and proper curiosity to see how the young woman lives. Archibald has been accustomed to the very best, and I shall be terribly disappointed if he is likely to be deprived of any of his comforts."

With this excellent resolution firmly secured, Agatha arrayed herself in her most sumptuous apparel and started on her

Little Miss Dee

friendly errand. Now, while the styles had changed, as styles capriciously will, since Agatha had journeyed from the country, she had been true to such fashions of a previous generation, and to such elementary principles of simple elegance as she deemed appropriate to a woman of her age and position. At the same time she could not help falling somewhat under the spell of city regulations and ideas, and the result was a combination of bizarre effects that startled the beholder. But on this momentous occasion she decided that she must take unusual pains with her attire, so she carefully brought out her very best black silk and all her laces and all her most precious ornaments and spread them admiringly on the bed. And when an hour later she emerged from the house in this finery, her little white curls peeping out from her lace-trimmed bonnet, the jabot of lace fastened by a cameo breastpin, her white handkerchief—more lace—protruding from her belt, her black silk mitts carefully drawn on, just showing the garnet ring on

Little Miss Dee

her finger and surmounted by heavy, chased gold bracelets, one might have thought that an old portrait had stepped down from its frame.

Agatha debated long with herself as to the manner of proceeding to the conference. "It is not so very far," she said, "and I could walk just as well as not, but that would be hardly proper, considering the nature of my mission, and I am too dressed up to take ordinary means. As for street cars they are out of the question, for they do not bring me within two blocks of the house." She sighed as she thought of squandering so much money on her personal vanity, "But then," she reasoned, "it would please Archie to know that I went in good style and showed his friends that we have correct ideas." Accordingly she called a cab and rolled away in great dignity and state. Whatever the Blatchford neighborhood may have thought of Little Miss Dee, proceeding leisurely to her destination in an open hansom, she confessed to herself that the neighborhood

Little Miss Dee

was perfectly satisfactory, and that so far as externals go she could not have chosen more wisely for Archie than he had chosen for himself. So pleased was she that the smile of gratification was still illuminating her face when in response to the maid's announcement Miss Blatchford appeared on the scene.

In addition to her other qualifications Miss Blatchford possessed some very decided opinions as to the proprieties of life, and the unexpected arrival of Miss Dee, however commendable the impulse, did not appeal forcibly to her sense of the fitness of things. "Because I have consented to marry Archibald," she said, rather petulantly to herself, "it does not follow that I must be burdened with his whole outfit of relations," and with this thought in her mind, her face was even more forbidding than usual as she came into the reception-room.

In rehearsing the scene while she was dressing Agatha had pictured herself approaching Miss Blatchford, drawing her

Little Miss Dee

fondly to her bosom and affectionately and reassuringly giving her a maternal kiss. One glance at the young woman's face, however, convinced her that it would be discreet to alter this plan of operations. Still she was not disposed to be wholly put out by any frostiness which might yield to gentle treatment, and she cordially held out her hand, which fell just short of Miss Blatchford's finger tips. "I have come to see you, and to congratulate you, my dear," she said.

"Ah, indeed?" replied the amiable Luella.

"I dare say it isn't customary," went on Agatha, recalling the conversation with Miss Parsons, "but I did want you to know exactly how I feel in a matter which so deeply concerns Archibald's happiness. You know he is my adopted son."

"I am not sure, but I think I have heard him mention it," was Miss Blatchford's cordial response. And with this she looked listlessly about the room, as if to say, "What next?"

Little Miss Dee

Agatha coughed to conceal a measure of nervousness caused by her unexpected reception, and then she said, very gently, "Archie does not know that I have come to see you this afternoon, but I thought it would be well for us to get acquainted at once, and I presume that your time is much taken up with your domestic duties—bless me, what a big house you have—and it is always easy for me to get away. We are living at Mrs. Braidwood's. No doubt you know her; she has lived so many years in the city. What a charming woman she is, so simple and unaffected."

"I don't believe I have ever had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Braidwood," returned the affable Luella, "but I am glad for your sake that she is charming. You were saying—"

By this time Agatha had lost much of her composure. "Why, really, I don't know exactly what I was saying. I think we were talking about Archie. He is a dear boy, Miss Blatchford, and deserves all the happiness that I feel you will give him."

Little Miss Dee

Even the icy Luella was not proof against this burst of affection, and she answered, with a warmth almost human, "I hope we shall be quite happy; thank you very much, Miss Dee."

There was another pause, and Agatha fingered her bracelets nervously. She looked out of the window and caught sight of the cabman. "Dear me," she thought, "I am paying for that cab by the hour, but I must be careful not to show any signs of uneasiness, or the young lady will think I am not used to these extravagances." And then she said, "I see that the horse is getting restive. Now you will come to see me, will you not, my dear? It will not seem so much like losing Archie if we get well acquainted."

"I think I may promise myself that pleasure," responded the affectionate Luella, "but as you said a moment ago, I am very busy and my time is much taken up. Of course you know the wedding is not immediate."

"To be honest with you, my dear, I

Little Miss Dee

don't know very much about it. You see Archie has hardly had time to give me any of the particulars further than the mere announcement of the engagement, and he isn't to be taken into the firm until the first of the year."

Miss Blatchford suppressed a slight yawn. "Mr. Dee has not confided any of his business arrangements to me, and I was not thinking of him when I spoke. I meant that it would not be convenient for me to be married at present."

"Oh," said Agatha, and with all her kindness of heart and charity for everybody it began to be borne vaguely in on her that perhaps Archie had not chosen so wisely, for all his superior wisdom and acquaintance with society. "Then," she went on, "you will have plenty of time to know each other well and to examine your hearts before it is too late." She rose to go, and it seemed to her that in rising also Miss Blatchford displayed more alacrity than had hitherto characterized her movements. "I hope you will not think I am

Little Miss Dee

presumptuous in showing this anxiety to meet you and to become well acquainted."

"O, not at all. I am very glad, I'm sure. When we are married you must let me see a good deal of you. It will always give me pleasure to entertain any of Mr. Dee's family and friends."

"I don't know," soliloquized Agatha, as she rolled home, "that I am quite certain that I invested two dollars very profitably to-day. But perhaps it is all my imagination. Naturally the young lady was ill at ease, as I have no doubt I should be if I were similarly placed. That was a great deal of money to spend for the gratification of curiosity, although I shall not complain if it turns out well. I wonder if the maid told her that I came in a cab. Archie will be disappointed if she does not know it. If I had suspected that she was not coming to the door or going to the window, I might just as easily have walked."

This torturing doubt threw a gloom over Agatha's spirits, and she had hardly rallied from the depression when Archibald came

Little Miss Dee

home and heard the particulars of the expedition. Archibald Dee, like many young men of inexperience, felt ill at ease. He was loyal and just enough to appreciate the motives that prompted the visit, and his better nature told him that he must stand by one who deserved far more than he could offer, but he feared ridicule hardly less than he dreaded "scenes," and he found himself miserably wavering between love and duty on the one side and love and banter on the other.

"My dear boy," said Agatha, all unconscious of this struggle, "your happiness is worth everything to me, and if I can know that you are going to be happy, that is satisfaction enough. This young lady must be a very superior girl or you would not have been attracted to her, and I hope she will prove to be all that you expect. She is certainly good looking, and has a deal of manner, which one becomes accustomed to in time. I don't think I made much of an impression, but I fancy she didn't see my cab."

Little Miss Dee

And Archibald, who had shaken off his cowardly misgivings, replied in that light caressing way which was always followed by Agatha's unconditional surrender: "You seem to forget, my dear little mother, that a cab is not likely to overwhelm Miss Blatchford. You see she is rather accustomed to that sort of thing, and takes it for granted. But when she knows you as I know you"—and here he patted her affectionately—"she will love you as we all love you."

And with this tribute to womanly and maternal virtue the conquering Archibald gave his little mother a hasty peck on the forehead and went off to his club. And Agatha looked after him with swimming eyes, and wondered if in all the world another such paragon of manly goodness and elegance could be found. "I tell you, Sarah Parsons," she said, as later she confided her experiences and impressions to that well-meaning but pessimistic woman, "the Lord has never forsaken us yet, and I feel that He will remain with us to the end."

THE accession of Archibald Dee to the highly respected and influential firm of Claxton, Faxon & Dee, attorneys and counselors at law, was speedily followed by the marriage of the junior member to the accomplished and austere Miss Blatchford. Of this brilliant function, the contemporary press spoke in the most glowing terms, conceding the felicity of the union, and giving such space to particulars as the social station of the Blatchfords demanded. Agatha had not been a conspicuous feature of the festivities, and in the excitement of the occasion she might have been overlooked altogether had it not been for the forethought of old Blatchford, the father, who kept her in rather close communication, perhaps in verification of the trite proverb that misery loves company. The senior Blatchford was not completely in touch with the high life by which he had of late years been surrounded, and as his

Little Miss Dee

mission was chiefly that of one who receives and pays the bills, he was by common consent of the family permitted to vanish and enjoy himself in his own darkened and benighted way whenever a social irruption was scheduled. During the engagement season he had formally called on Agatha, and finding her country born and bred like himself, he had secretly opened his heart and confided to her that the existence of the head of a fashionable family bears no very distant resemblance to a bed of thorns, a confession which Agatha had no special desire to dispute.

Accordingly, when after the ceremony at the church, old Blatchford had run across Agatha at the family residence, looking very forlorn and despondent, and not at all sure of her bearings, he had rounded her into line and implored her in a whisper to stick to him, and in no event to desert him in the hour of tribulation. So Agatha stood up for a wearisome period, very stiff and still very miserable, perfectly conscious that something was the matter with her

Little Miss Dee

wedding gown, and listening mechanically to the stream of names that flowed into her ear after the manner of perfunctory introductions. And at the close of the presentations and congratulations old Blatchford, moist and wretched, carried her off to a refreshment table, where they were jostled and pushed and trampled upon, but otherwise ignored, until Archibald and Luella came down for the fond farewells. Long afterward Agatha remembered that she had reached up and kissed Luella's cold and unresponsive lips, and had burst into tears when she threw her arms around her boy. And Archibald had kissed her affectionately before that whole fashionable company, and had said in words that everybody could hear, "Good by, mother dear," adding, in a lower tone to old Blatchford, "You will look after my mother, sir, till I get back." And old Blatchford, still perspiring and still very ill at ease, had promised with the first evidence of heartiness he had shown during the evening, while all the bride's attendants

Little Miss Dee

and the visiting young women murmured, "How dear," and the elderly ladies fanned their approval. But Luella looked bored, as became a self-possessed and regal bride.

The months preceding the wedding had not been specially joyous for Agatha, between whom and the bride-elect a peculiarly hard and stony wall had risen. Miss Luella, apropos of nothing in particular, had expressed herself very early in the action to the effect that young people should be permitted to live their lives in their own way, and Agatha, who was by no means devoid of spirit when occasion demanded, had replied that, so far as she was individually concerned, she had no inclination to interfere with young people who regarded her presence an interference. Whereupon the amiable Luella made no pretense of concealing her satisfaction at this personal application, and gave voice to her approval of Miss Dee's correct way of looking at things. Archibald was not slow in appreciating the state of affairs, but with the easy assurance of a young man who

Little Miss Dee

flatters himself that he is an expert judge of feminine nature, looked on tolerantly and assumed that the little natural friction would eventually disappear, and that the sweet tolerance of his intended wife's nature would be sure to assert itself. It was only a few nights before the wedding that, with considerable clearing of the throat and preliminary exhibitions of affection, he encouraged himself to bring up the subject of future relations, a topic which Agatha had scrupulously refrained from mentioning.

"Of course, my dear little mother," he began, and he spoke with not a little tenderness, "it is better for a while at least that Luella and I should be left to ourselves. Aside from the wisdom of such a step as a general principle, you understand, and you must have seen, that Luella is different from a majority of young women we know."

"I am afraid she is, Archie, at least from young women I know," said Agatha, with a slight undercurrent of bitterness.

"Still," he went on, not noting the trace

Little Miss Dee

of sarcasm, "it will be very hard for me to leave you alone in this boarding-house."

"Don't think of that, my dear. I am quite well accustomed to solitude." And then fearing that she might have wounded his feelings, she said, hastily, "I like to be alone. You know that is why I chose my room on the top floor. The one objection to this house is that I have so little time to myself. It will be a positive relief to be so situated for a while that I can feel that I have only my own selfish impulses to consult."

The astute Archibald brightened at this. "I am glad you feel that way," he said, "for it makes it so much easier for me. And it will be only for a short time at the most. It has been my fondest wish to provide a home where you can live and be happy with Luella and me."

Little Miss Dee went over to the chair where he was sitting, and put her arm gently around his neck, and smoothed his hair, and if he had looked he would have seen tears in those dark eyes. But he was

Little Miss Dee

remembering that he was already fifteen minutes late, and that Luella never forgave tardiness in the concerns of love. More than this, tears always affected him unpleasantly, so it was wisely ordained that he should not see them. A young man who has reached the ripe age of thirty argues that women are most unreasonable in the exhibition of their emotions, and in this belief Archibald had been strenuously upheld by Luella, who was apparently a young woman of no emotions whatever. In consequence of his preoccupation Agatha had plenty of time to master her grief, which she really believed to be selfish and unworthy.

“It seems to me, Archie,” she said, at last, “that we shall be much happier if we stop worrying about the future and take the present as it comes. A man with your prospects and social connections cannot afford to jeopardize them by doing anything that may make complications, and a woman with my desire to have her own way, and a disposition to be dictatorial,

Little Miss Dee

would be wretched if she were put in a position of inferiority."

"O, come, now," exclaimed Archie, magnanimously, "really you mustn't talk that way." And he patted her affectionately on the back, at the same time looking at his watch. Poor Agatha, struggling to believe that whatever is tends to happiness, and that in this bright old world of ours everything is fair and sweet except the too human emotions of one old maid's heart. Poor Archibald, blind where he should see, and weak where he should be strong, and thinking, with the self-sufficiency of youth, that one generous impulse makes reparation for a legion of possible mistakes. So Archibald went off to his bride and his new life, and Agatha went back to the little room in the fourth story, the flowers, the lake view, and the clustering associations of the shadowy past.

During the events leading up to the marriage of Archibald, Herbert Ainslie had not forgotten his obligations to Mrs. Braidwood, and his promise to renew his

Little Miss Dee

acquaintance with that hospitable house. As with many other gentlemen well into or past middle life, Ainslie had found in the society of Agatha Dee a pleasant reminder of his early youth, which was now far enough back to wear all the rose tinges and some of the glamour of a fairy land. In this respect he was not different from a majority of people of sentiment and imagination who live quite as much in fancy as in reality. To return to his old home was out of the question, for with all his admiration of the past he was sufficiently sane to realize that imagination is much safer than a cold awakening, so he lived on in the city content to believe his boyhood life as he pictured it, and asking nothing more than such agreeable reminiscences as humored his fancy. These reminiscences Agatha was abundantly able to supply, inasmuch as she was largely a part of them, and as she was sympathetically in touch with the past, while lacking perhaps the man's exuberance of illusion, it was not strange that their united efforts made a heaven of

Little Miss Dee

their old home which the active residents would have failed to recognize.

Vanity was no more a part of Agatha's nature than properly and justly belongs to woman, but if she chose to array herself with a little more care when her former lover called, it is fair to presume that it would be not the less pleasing to the casual spectator. Her ideas of dress, based on primitive and old-fashioned styles, with a wonderful conjunction of modern modes, were rather bewildering, and they served to emphasize the peculiarities and eccentricities of the Dee family nature, which were growing more pronounced with the years. It might have been said of her when she was fairly decked out that she resembled nothing so much as an old-fashioned flower garden, for she rioted in color, and often with a disregard of the harmonies. Much of this, however, was premeditated, for she had distinct views of the specific effects of shades, and maintained that a little red or scarlet worn at the throat promoted cheerfulness and optimism, and

Little Miss Dee

overcame the disastrous influence of the somber body of attire. For Ainslie's benefit—though it is possible that the attention was lost on him as a specific concession—she often wore her antique ornaments, the high comb she had been so proud of in her girlhood, the old cameo brooch he had admired in the past so precious to them both, the queer little amethyst ring he had presented to her on her seventeenth birthday anniversary with the guarded consent of the elder members of her family. It is not presumed that there was any subtle or coy design in this presentation of bygone sumptuousness, or that the ring was displayed with any significant purpose beyond the amiable intention suggested; it was enough for Agatha that she was temporarily living in the past and giving to her companion the full enjoyment of his powers of imagination. And when she appeared in Mrs. Braidwood's parlor on the occasion of Mr. Ainslie's visits, now becoming more frequent, it seemed to those who passed in and out that a last cen-

Little Miss Dee

ture spirit might have come back to earth to take note of modern desecration, so erroneously called progress.

Those of her own sex who were near to Agatha at this period ventured the suggestion that her habits of mind were rapidly taking the form of eccentricity. Miss Parsons, who was not entirely devoid of mental oddity, recalled the fact that the members of the Dee family had never been quite balanced in the late years of their lives, that Agatha's mother was always a little queer, and that her father was erratic and whimsical to an unusual degree. These feminine remarks were made in the kindest and most tolerant spirit, and the ladies would have been truly grieved had any wrong or too serious construction been placed thereon. To a less close observer it would have appeared that Agatha merely exercised the privilege of a maiden lady to be a little out of the ordinary, and that the eccentricities as they developed, added piquancy to a character already interesting.

Whatever form this eccentricity might

Little Miss Dee

have taken it did not manifest itself unpleasantly to Herbert Ainslie, who sought the society of Agatha as often as was consistent with the position of an old friend and a man well along in widowhood. The frequency of these visits, with their possible significance, was not lost on Miss Parsons, who despite her generally tearful and pessimistic condition, was keenly sensible of an affair of sentiment, as every woman should be. "It is not my province to meddle with other people's business, Agatha Dee," she remarked one evening at the customary private gathering before bedtime, "and I don't pretend to be a profound student of human nature, but it does seem to me that Mr. Ainslie is coming here a good deal oftener than is warranted by a mere old-time acquaintance."

Agatha's eyes opened in astonishment. "Do you really think so?" she inquired, and showed that she was much perturbed by the information. "Do you think people are talking?"

"Well, as to that," replied the cautious

Little Miss Dee

Sarah, "I can't say. They may be, and then again they may not be. There's no great harm done if they are, always provided, of course, that there is real solid foundation for the talk. But I must admit, Agatha Dee, that I am terribly afraid of these middle-aged men; they are unscrupulous and inclined to be flirts."

"Mr. Ainslie is not unscrupulous," said Agatha, decisively, "and he's not a flirt. Even if he were it would not affect me. I have known him for forty years."

"Which proves nothing," answered Miss Parsons, adding, reminiscently, "I knew a man back East whom everybody had known for fifty years. He was a pillar in the church, and was so respected that we all looked for him to vanish like Enoch. And he did vanish finally, for one day—he was then sixty years old—he went off with a young girl just out of her teens, and the next thing we heard of him he was down in Hartford getting married."

"The story is interesting," admitted Agatha, "but I cannot agree that it is

Little Miss Dee

criminal, and I certainly cannot understand what it has to do with me. Mr. Ainslie is not sixty, and I have been out of my teens a long time. We are not in love with each other, and we have no intention of getting married in Hartford or anywhere else."

"I didn't say that the cases were exactly parallel," explained Miss Parsons, "I merely told the story to prove that you never can tell what is in a man's mind or what moment he is going to do something outrageous."

"Which may mean," said Agatha, smilingly, "that, being a man, Mr. Ainslie is necessarily plotting something outrageous, and that while he may seemingly come to this house to talk over old times with me, or enjoy the society of older ladies, he is secretly planning to elope with Mrs. Braidwood's youngest daughter."

Miss Parsons shrugged her shoulders. "It may be. As strange things have happened, and men are men."

"Well," went on Agatha, with a smile, "I may as well tell you, Sarah, that when

Little Miss Dee

this happens there will be no opposition from me. I shall not stand in the young lady's way."

"Do I understand you to say, Agatha Dee," asked Miss Parsons, rather more eagerly than cautiously, "that you do not care anything for Mr. Ainslie, and that you would not marry him?"

"How do I know what you understand?" retorted Agatha, still smiling. "But as Mr. Ainslie has not asked me to marry him, and apparently has no such intention, I cannot think we are putting in our time profitably discussing what I might or might not do."

"Marriage is a very delightful state under proper conditions," remarked Miss Parsons, meditatively.

"We need not discuss it as a matter of propriety, Sarah," replied Agatha. "Personally it does not interest me one way or the other. I am very well satisfied with my lot as I find it, and I hope you are."

Miss Parsons gave her friend a melancholy and reproachful glance. "Have I

Little Miss Dee

ever given you occasion to doubt my contentment, Agatha Dee?"

Agatha laughed, whereupon Miss Parsons's handkerchief went to her ready eyes, and Agatha walked over quickly and put her arm around her friend. "Never mind, Sarah," she said, cheerily, "if we are not wholly contented we are at least resigned, and that's enough for two old maids."

IN the various conversations incident to Mr. Ainslie's excursions to the Braidwood house reference had been made to the late Mrs. Ainslie, who had been highly esteemed during her brief career for her charms and virtues. That Herbert Ainslie had made a love marriage, that his married life was marked by every evidence of affection and consideration, and that he had deeply mourned the termination of his conjugal happiness all the ladies conversant with the facts freely acknowledged. Indeed, it was brought home rather strongly to Agatha, by those who presumably knew nothing of the earlier romance, that nobody could fill the place of the departed one, and that Ainslie was a model of constancy to an ideal. These assertions, always accompanied by feminine expressions of admiration for the loyal husband, did not weigh very perceptibly on Agatha's spirits, and her tranquillity remained unshaken, as

Little Miss Dee

was becoming in a woman of fixed purpose and well-grounded principles. As for Mr. Ainslie himself, he spoke, when occasion demanded, with the frankness of a man who had nothing to conceal and no object to gain. It is probable that in his first interview with Agatha he was stirred by faint memories and interested in the revival of the past, while the sentimentalism, which was so much a part of his nature, served, as time went on, to invest his old sweetheart with attributes not commonly found in mortal circles. All of which, however, was a steady and decorous development.

Archibald and his wife had returned, and had set up an establishment comformable to Mrs. Dee's social position and obligations to the higher family life. This establishment Agatha did not frequent more persistently than her sense of propriety dictated, for there was something in Luella's attitude which gave her home the impression of a private park with "No Trespassing" and "Keep Off the Grass" signs in abundance. Archibald had at-

Little Miss Dee

tempted, good naturedly, to bring about a happy family feeling, and had even suggested somewhat faintly that decency demanded that his mother should live with him. To this both ladies had demurred, Luella on the high scriptural ground that a man should forsake all and cleave unto his wife, while Agatha asserted her independence by declaring that she was now at a time of life when she must have comfort and peace, such as she could always enjoy in the Braidwood top story. And Archibald, who was never a forceful character in an encounter with the feminine will, meekly subsided and went off to his regular pursuits, assured that he had done all that lay in man's power. So Little Miss Dee was left to fight out the battle of life as her spirit and her now reduced income might permit.

The conversation with Miss Parsons, and the suggestion of the interpretation that might be put on the frequency of the visits from Mr. Ainslie, had excited Agatha's alarm. In many ways she was wholly

Little Miss Dee

unconventional, despising the small tittle tattle of life and the absurd restrictions of a suspicious and evil-minded community; but with a sort of maidenly reserve she shrank from anything that could connect her name with that of a man. She reflected with much pleasure that so far as her conduct went it had been free from all offence. She had received an old friend openly and with no affectation of coquetry, and on one or two occasions only had accompanied him to the park and the garden, where they had met after their years of separation. She had customarily addressed him as "Mr. Ainslie," very rarely lapsing into the more familiar salutation "Herbert," as might have been justifiable in consideration of all the circumstances, and only once, and then in a moment of extreme jocularity, had she ventured to call him by his old childhood name, "Bertie." Surely she had been discreet in every possible way, as a maiden in her position should be, and had done nothing at variance with the strictest laws of spinsterhood.

Little Miss Dee

But with all her care and forethought, Miss Parsons had made it perfectly clear that there was danger in the air, that the tongues of people were wagging, or would soon wag, which was much the same thing, and that she was, or soon would be, an object of suspicion and public gossip. What would Archibald say when he heard that his little mother was pursuing a line of conduct that amounted to a flirtation? What would the cold and austere Luella think when the scandal reached her ears? What would be the effect on both if society took up the subject and discussed it? For did she not know that society is always discussing such subjects? How could she hope to prove her innocence by a simple declaration of denial, and maintain her right to remain a member of Mrs. Braidwood's hitherto impeccable household? To what extent might not the evil shafts of slander reach if she continued to defy public opinion and allow Mr. Ainslie to proceed unchecked? The maidenly proprieties must not be trifled

Little Miss Dee

with; the worm of evil report must be killed at once.

Meanwhile, Herbert Ainslie, all unconscious of the gross impropriety of his conduct, and thinking only of the agreeable return to the thoughts of his youth, dropped in on Little Miss Dee just at the moment when she was engaged with the tremendous conflict with her principles. The afternoon was perfect, the October air was crisp enough to invite a walk, and it seemed a favorable day to take a last look at the fading flowers in the old garden in the park. If Herbert Ainslie had been less of a dreamer and more of an observing man of affairs, he would have seen a fixed look of determination in Agatha's eyes and a firm setting of the jaws as she accepted his invitation.

It may have been fate which induced Ainslie, after they had reached the park, and had slowly inspected the dying beauties of the garden, to lead the way to the rustic bench where they had sat together on the memorable afternoon of their meeting.

Little Miss Dee

The man had been recalling an incident of childhood in which both had figured, and the woman had listened silently, for the voice of duty was calling to her loudly, and she was wondering how she could with all possible delicacy broach the disagreeable subject. Failing to evolve any subtle scheme, she tried the next best plan, and reached the pith of the matter without ceremony.

“You know how much I despise gossip, Herbert, and what little attention I pay to it, but I have been hearing some things lately which lead me to fear you are coming to the house too often.”

Ainslie looked at her in astonishment, and then essayed a pleasantry: “How can that be, Agatha? You know, or should know, that I go to the house exclusively to see you, and I cannot do that too often.”

She seized the opportunity presented. “That is it exactly. Now, if you were a little more general in your attentions it might be different; but as it is, we are exciting comment.”

Little Miss Dee

A trace of a smile passed over Ainslie's face, but he replied with all seriousness, "Really, Agatha, I am the last person in the world who wishes to excite comment of any kind, yet I cannot see how the open and frank intercourse of two lifelong friends is going to disturb the public." He looked at her earnestly. "I hope this is not your delicate way of telling me that my society is not agreeable?"

Agatha was shocked by the construction. "You know better than that, Herbert; you know that I am always glad to see you, and that we are, as you say, fast and lifelong friends. I am thinking only of the compromising effect too frequent calls may have."

For a full minute Ainslie was silent. "I am trying to think," he said at last, "what we can do to counteract this compromising effect and at the same time permit ourselves to enjoy life in our simple, rational way. One plan happily presents itself. Agatha, will you be my wife?"

Little Miss Dee turned abruptly and

Little Miss Dee

looked him squarely in the face. On her own countenance was an expression of astonishment hardly short of petrification. He did not wait for her to speak, but went on deliberately:

“What I have just said is merely what I have intended to say for some time, and what I have neglected to say simply because I did not realize that the time had arrived. It is no sudden impulse, and it comes from no emotion born in an hour or a day. And so I say again, will you be my wife?”

Another minute passed, and not a word came from the woman sitting motionless at his side. He went on as quietly and deliberately as before:

“We were lovers, Agatha, in the spring-time of life, that happy springtime we have so often praised. We were separated and our summer came and went while we were far apart. And now in our autumn we are brought providentially together. You see the providence, do you not?”

When she still refused to speak he said:

Little Miss Dee

"I am all alone in the world, Agatha, and so are you. Your charge has left you, and there is nobody now to whom you can so naturally turn as to me. Don't you remember, dear, when we were young how I used to say that it was ordained that we should be mated, and how often that thought has come to me, even when I was happy with my wife. Don't start, Agatha; it is with no disloyalty to her that I say it, for I could not divest myself of the idea that what my youth had decreed time must surely bring about."

He paused, more as if in thought than waiting for her to reply. And then he pointed to a fading rose growing apart in a clump of decaying vegetation. "See that rose, Agatha; it is dying, alone and neglected, just as you and I must die if we follow out our life as it runs at present. Think of it, Agatha, the pity of it! To die, alone and forgotten."

Little Miss Dee shuddered, and then she turned again and looked at her girlhood lover with eyes that were blurred with

Little Miss Dee

tears. She put her hand on his, and said, in a tone that was barely audible: "Don't speak of this, Herbert. It is impossible; it is unnecessary—and O, so cruel."

"I cannot think it is cruel, Agatha," he answered, gently, "and why should we say that it is impossible? Put yourself in my place as I have tried to put myself in yours. My life is comfortable enough, so far as material matters go, for happily I am able to provide for needs greater than my tastes require, but this does not take into account the desolation of my mind, the constant knowledge that I am living in loneliness. Your home is a boarding-house, where, as you have just confessed, you are subjected to every restriction a petty world can suggest. Where, then, is the impossibility?"

His pleading had given Agatha time to regain a measure of composure, and while he had been speaking her mind had traveled back over the waste of years since he had talked with her so tenderly in that spring-time he remembered. But there was no

Little Miss Dee

emotion of resentment or grief for that lost day; they might have been lovers still so far as was indicated by the softness of her manner and the calmness of her voice.

"You do not understand, Herbert. It is not of these material comforts I am thinking, and I do not deny that I often fight against a sense of loneliness and depression such as you have described. But it is too late to say that we were ordained for each other. I cannot find that conviction in my heart. Perhaps I thought so once, but Gertrude came between us and I knew I was mistaken."

The man flushed and bent his head. She touched his arm caressingly, as she said, "Do not misunderstand me. It was right that it should be so. What had been ordained came to pass, and in all those previous years we were mistaken. We have nothing to reproach ourselves for, since time alone could prove to us that it had been otherwise decreed."

Ainslie was bewildered. "Even supposing we were wrong in one instance,

Little Miss Dee

though unconsciously so, it does not seem to follow that we could not be right in the other.”

It was Agatha's turn to be surprised. With her fixed principles she could not argue from the man's standpoint or comprehend his failure to grasp her meaning. “It would be wrong now,” she went on, “because what has been ordained has come to pass. Nothing in the present or in the future can change what both of us believe now to have been right.”

“Then you do not care for me, or could not care for me as you once did, or as I believed you did?”

“That is merely a matter of sentiment,” answered Agatha, evasively, “and sentiment has nothing to do with a case which is built up on principle. You belong as much to Gertrude now as if she stood alive before you. If there is anything in foreordination, I am sure that you belonged to her years before you met. Your later happiness proved it, and your own words have testified to it.”

Little Miss Dee

Ainslie shook his head, not in denial of what she was saying, but in confession of his inability to comprehend it. A middle-aged widower takes his defeat in the battles of love more philosophically than a younger, more ardent lover. His experience and quicker consciousness told him that the struggle had gone against him, and he did not return to the attack. "I shall not try to answer your reasoning, Agatha," he said, a little sadly, "for I feel that it would be useless. We are looking at the situation from two entirely different points of view, and I understand you well enough to know that you are battling from a hard principle rather than from a more human feeling. At least," and he took her hand, "we shall be as close as your scruples and our long friendship will allow. You need a friend such as I hope to be to you, Agatha, and I need your comradeship—more now than ever."

She smiled that radiant smile which a woman of convictions can so naturally dispense when she believes that she has lived

Little Miss Dee

up to a principle and a sacrifice, and she said, quite forgetting her earlier fears and the respect due to the critical public in the larger world she walked in, "We never could be less than friends and comrades, Herbert, and perhaps," she added, softly, "that is foreordained, too."

IF the direct question had been put to Miss Parsons, she would have admitted that she knew something was wrong. Like a well-trained and competent schoolmistress she was accustomed to consider things logically and in their natural order. She arranged her premises carefully and from them deduced the most irresistible conclusions. In the present instance the task was not particularly difficult. A man and a woman had left the house apparently in the best of spirits and on the most amiable terms. They had returned silent, and in the case of one at least, depressed. The man had gone away with nothing of that good-humored banter so characteristic of him, and later the woman had appeared at dinner with evidences of repentant tears. Of such phenomena there could be only one explanation, and Miss Parsons was the magician to interpret it. She knew her duty, and would not shrink

Little Miss Dee

from it. Courageous and loyal Miss Parsons!

Allowing a reasonable time for such duties as might take up the earlier part of the evening, Miss Parsons ascended to the fourth story and tapped at Agatha's door. Somewhat to her surprise she found the sufferer calmly reading, a fact which to Miss Parsons was merely one of the many conspicuous examples of the incomprehensibility of her own sex. But though surprised she was not intimidated or impeded in the discharge of her assumed obligation. She had a directness of speech which she had inherited from a long line of plain-spoken New Englanders, and she wasted no time in skirmishing.

"Agatha Dee," she began, "I feared you were in trouble, and I came up to see if I could do anything for you."

If Agatha was in trouble she dissembled bravely. She even looked amazed at the intimation. "Why do you think so?" she asked. "On general principles?"

Miss Parsons was not to be put off by

Little Miss Dee

what she considered palpably forced jocularity. "My conscience has been troubling me ever since we had that conversation about Mr. Ainslie and his frequent calls at the house."

"Then it is you who are in trouble, not I," said Agatha, "and it was my duty to comfort you. My dear Sarah, I've always heard about that New England conscience, with its terribly pricking ways, and what an annoying and inconvenient thing it is, and I must assure you that this time it has misled you. You have not the slightest reason to reproach yourself."

"Agatha Dee"—and this with severity—"you know you are deceiving me. You know that you and Mr. Ainslie have had unpleasant words. I read it in your face the minute I saw you this evening."

Agatha thought a moment before she answered. "I may as well tell you frankly, Sarah Parsons, since you are so observing, that I did have a conversation with Mr. Ainslie this afternoon, but you are wrong in the suspicion that there was

Little Miss Dee

any unpleasantness. I told him, however, what you were kind enough to tell me, that he has been coming here a little too frequently."

"Was that all?"

"Well, practically all."

"And he agreed with you?"

"O, as to that, I can't exactly say that he entirely agreed with me, but it came to the same thing."

"And he's not coming here again, and you are not going to see him any more, and everything is off?"

"My dear Sarah," exclaimed Agatha, "how many questions you have put. Do you expect me to answer them all at once?"

Miss Parsons was plainly agitated. "We have been friends, Agatha Dee, for many years, and I have always tried to do my duty to you as I have seen it. If I have failed it was because I was too zealous in my friendship. Agatha, I am afraid we have made a terrible mistake—a mistake which I did not realize at the time.

Little Miss Dee

You should not have listened to me when I told you to reject Mr. Ainslie."

The astonishment on Agatha's face was now no pretense. "What are you talking about, Sarah Parsons? You did not tell me to reject Mr. Ainslie, and even if you had told me I do not think it would have had any great effect. You had no reason to suspect that such advice was necessary. Why do you say it now?"

"Because I wish to undo what I have done before it is too late. Because I wish to save you from the folly I once committed. I could not be your friend if I failed in this—much less now since I am so largely responsible."

"But I tell you, Sarah, that you are responsible for nothing—at least for nothing that is not wholly to your credit and for my advantage. I do wish we could drop this subject. I am getting positively melancholy."

Miss Parsons wiped away a few tears, and it seemed to Agatha that they were more significant drops than she usually

Little Miss Dee

allowed to fall. Then she rose and hurriedly left the room, and while Agatha was struggling with amazement at this new outburst, she returned, bringing a small packet of letters carefully tied up with a faded yellow ribbon. Agatha looked at the packet and at her friend, curiously at the one, sympathetically at the other, for she felt that some ghost was coming from that little bundle of paper. Miss Parsons again wiped her eyes, carefully untied the ribbon which bound the packet, and took from the center of the letters one which seemed to be different from the rest. Then she said: "Here, Agatha Dee, is what you have mistaken for a New England conscience. It is the memory of this that has given me the horror of fearing that you may suffer as I have suffered." She took from the envelope the dry skeleton of a geranium leaf, so frail that a breath of wind might have crumbled it, and there was a tenderer look in her eyes as she looked at it. "The story of this leaf," she went on, "is a story I have never told

Little Miss Dee

to anybody until this moment. I tell it now only because I hope it may guide you safely."

If any of Miss Parsons's feminine friends other than Agatha had been favored with this confidence, she would have found it difficult to resist the impulse to run to the head of the stairs and cry out: "Come up here, everybody! Sarah Parsons has had a romance!" But there was so much that was pathetic in the old maid's earnestness, in her struggle against an emotion awakened after years of slumber, that Agatha pitied her from the bottom of her generous heart, and involuntarily made a gesture of restraint.

"Don't, Sarah," she said, gently; "it is sacred to you, and I know it hurts."

"They say that every woman has had her love dream at one time or another," Miss Parsons began, heedless of the remonstrance, "sometimes only a dream which has not even a leaf to recall it. After all, my story is hardly more than a dream, and there isn't much to tell. Pos-

Little Miss Dee

sibly it was, because I was so young that I have imagined it was so cruel. You see," she continued, absently, forgetting that she was at the beginning and not the end of her story, "we had been unconfessed lovers for two years—yes, I know you are thinking this could not happen anywhere except New England—and that night he asked me to marry him. Perhaps I did not then know my own heart, or perhaps I thought that coquetry was the surest way of gaining happiness, but when we parted I had given him no encouragement, and this, Agatha, is the geranium leaf I held in my hand."

"Geranium? that is for preference," said Agatha, softly.

"So you see it is not much of a story, and I have told it clumsily, but you know what happened—what always happens when honesty in love is forgotten."

"You did not see him again?"

"He went away the next day without a word. This is the geranium leaf, a poor reminder of that evening."

Little Miss Dee

“But,” persisted Agatha, “did you lose sight of him entirely? Has he never crossed your path or in any way entered into your life? Is he still living?”

“I do not know.”

“Are you waiting for him?”

“Perhaps I am; how can I tell. It is certainly the privilege of an old maid to wait.”

Then Agatha, with pity looking out of her eyes, said, with a little quaver in her voice, “The sadness of your life hangs round a geranium leaf, Sarah, and perhaps must linger there. Let me keep your story and your secret, but rest your mind so far as I am concerned. The geranium leaf in my life withered and perished many years ago.”

HAD Herbert Ainslie come from the old fighting stock of the Dees, it is likely that he would not have surrendered so easily, and perhaps he might have carried his point, even against so strong a principle, for a woman likes nothing so much as opposition and a conquering spirit in the affairs of love. But Ainslie was a mild philosopher, and not a fighter, and once convinced that his cause was hopeless, he resigned himself to the old indolent life as it came, content to believe that everything is for the best, and that life is too placid and agreeable to be upset by persistent pursuit of an elusive object. He would not concede, however, that the privileges of comradeship had been forfeited, and now that everything had been established on a satisfactory basis, and the uncomfortable opposition of Miss Parsons had been removed, public opinion would have been greatly exercised if public opinion had

Little Miss Dee

deigned to take the slightest notice of the innocent wanderings and conversations of these two reputable middle-aged persons. Miss Parsons, in fact, had been taken with such a revulsion of feeling that she promoted in every way the agreeable intercourse, and even resorted to reprehensible conspiracies to bring about a readjustment of the relations. A woman who is not active either in advancing a romance or destroying it is devoid of the true feminine impulse.

Agatha's man of affairs, whose duty it was to look after her small interests and send her the little income she derived from her property, communicated to her from time to time the unsatisfactory information that times were hard and that she must retrench as much as possible. And Agatha, who had lived in an atmosphere of retrenchment until she knew no other condition, promised faithfully to curtail her expenses, and abandon all luxuries that might not conform to the symmetry of Mrs. Braidwood's top story. At regular

Little Miss Dee

intervals Archibald would appear on the scene and renew an expression of hope that his little mother might be induced to make his house her home—always provided Luella could be brought to an appreciation of the exigencies of the case. But Luella was never to be found in that appreciative mood, and Agatha would reply kindly, but with an admixture of spirit, that she was getting along very comfortably, that her income was sufficient for her needs, and that she thought she could worry along without making any changes just at present. Then Archibald would hint that as he was making just a little more than his own needs strictly demanded, it might be a filial act to provide more commodious quarters for the little mother than a small room in the top story of a boarding-house, and Agatha would answer firmly that she could not be happy anywhere else, the air was so good and the light so perfect. Whereupon Archibald, a well-meaning young man, but singularly lacking in disputatious qualities for so ad-

Little Miss Dee

mirable a lawyer, would give up the point and take a continuance to another day.

It had always been an interesting development of the nature of the members of the Dee family that as they advanced in years they grew more respectful toward the ancient family prophecy. Agatha was no exception to the rule. Accustomed to it from her childhood, she had regarded it at first with amused toleration, and then, as she saw its effect on her father, with a little vexation. For forty years she had been disposed to dismiss it as an idle superstition, something that had to be borne if only as a connecting link with a long and respectable ancestry, but in other respects a fairy tale hardly tolerable in the nursery. She had told the story to Archibald as her father had related it to her, and she had even, half-jocularly, suggested to him the possibility of vindicating the prediction and redeeming the family name, but the subject had not been mentioned by either since Archibald had come into full possession of his reasoning faculties.

Little Miss Dee

Herbert Ainslie was perfectly familiar with the Dee prophecy, having heard it from the old pensioner himself, and having treated it with the greatest irreverence when the old Major's back was turned. In his later years he had mentioned it occasionally to Agatha, and usually in a jocular and even flippant tone, which at first she did not resent, but with her change of attitude there was a corresponding adroit shift of his own; he was quick enough to see that it was poor policy to fight against a family superstition, and he was too amiable and too sincerely attached to his old friend to sport with her feelings. Furthermore, the prophecy was an inexhaustible subject for conversation, and could always be introduced when other topics flagged. Like its twin, genealogy, the leading family incident is never out of place.

It had come suddenly to Agatha that the prophecy was not flourishing as in the good old times. She remembered her father's words, that the credit of the family was now in her keeping, and she recalled

Little Miss Dee

her own promise in behalf of Archibald. But Archibald, content with a wealthy wife and a moderate amount of labor in his profession, did not seem to be in a way to perform any striking deed of heroism or to bother himself about it, and the possibilities of an obscure little woman, shut up in the top floor of a boarding-house were certainly not dazzling in their brilliancy. The more Agatha thought of her failure to meet the family responsibility the more depressed she became, and the more she sought interpretation and advice. These essentials Herbert Ainslie cheerfully contributed, and it came to pass that rarely did they meet that they did not refer in one way or another to the chances of the fulfillment of the prediction, increasing or decreasing according to the condition of Agatha's spirits.

Herbert Ainslie, like a true and consistent philosopher, had never returned indelicately to the subject of the decisive conversation in the park. The result of that exchange of confidences had left no

Little Miss Dee

bitterness, but the tacit understanding seemed to forbid the recurrence. Yet Ainslie, in common with other philosophers, could not desist from discussing love in the abstract, and in a few months he had so far recovered his spirits and cheerfulness as to speak of his own affairs of the heart as a good-natured misunderstanding which was a rather pleasant memory. Miss Parsons, notwithstanding her pessimistic nature, cherished agreeable hopes that her error, as she persisted in calling it, might be remedied, and while she no longer produced the geranium leaf in evidence as a warning to coquetry and stubborn pride, she neglected no opportunity of discoursing with considerable feeling on the importance of thoroughly understanding the dictates of one's own heart before it is too late.

So, in this friendly and not altogether unprofitable manner, one month succeeded another, and if the sprightliness of Mr. Ainslie's movements decreased, if the oddity of Miss Dee's nature became a little

Little Miss Dee

more emphatic, if the amiable hopes of Miss Parsons were a trifle dimmer, there was at least no change in the friendly relations which were still lost on an unobserving world. It had been Ainslie's custom, with that regularity which is so fixedly the method of elderly men of leisure, to put in an appearance at the Braidwood house Tuesday and Thursday evenings, with Sunday afternoon thrown in as an auspicious day for a circumspect walk to the park or along the lake shore; and as Mr. Ainslie was methodical to a fault, there was little occasion to chide him for failure to comply with the established custom. But one Tuesday in the early spring Agatha was astonished and chagrined to note that the evening had slipped away without the usual visitor, and this amazement was increased to a positive attack of nerves when Thursday came and went without explanation or presence. Agatha confided to Miss Parsons that though she was not in the least put out or distressed by such unexpected and extraordinary treatment, since it was

Little Miss Dee

Mr. Ainslie's privilege to come or stay away as he pleased, she did think it rather queer that so punctilious a gentleman should be so lacking in observance of the ordinary conventions. And Miss Parsons, with her mind firmly fixed on the tragedy of the geranium leaf, held her peace and trembled.

The following morning Agatha received a note from the offender. He expressed his regret at his loss of the two evenings, and ventured to hope that his absence had been noticed and deplored. The fact was that he had been confined to the house by his doctor's orders—nothing more than a trifling indisposition he believed—and would his old friend do him the kindness to come and cheer him in his loneliness. His old friend read the letter with a perceptible flutter. She did not stop to consider the proprieties, as maidenly caution and shyness might have suggested; she did not even pause to consult Miss Parsons as to the advisability of taking so advanced a step. A great fear came suddenly upon

Little Miss Dee

her; a voice seemed to tell her that something very near and necessary was slipping out of her life, and that in all the mysterious changes of this strange world a change was coming to her own little lot. While this fear was still insistent she hurried to him. Happily, as she believed, the physician had exaggerated the ailment. Ainslie was right; the trouble was merely temporary, and there was nothing to indicate a crisis. However, he had sent for her; he was ill at least, and needed a cheering presence. They were old friends, as he had said, and it was plainly her duty as a Christian woman and a sympathetic companion to do what she could to make him forget his indisposition. His face lighted up when he saw her. "It was good of you to come, Agatha," he said, "but I knew you would not desert me, even if I do belong to somebody else." He held out his hand in apology for the raillery. "I stood it as long as I could, for you see I have not forgotten your principles, but I was always very weak and human."

Little Miss Dee

Agatha blushed at this mild word of reproach, and he smiled at her confusion, and told her it was not like so strong a woman to be so easily embarrassed. And when she was once more mistress of herself she sat down and told him all the gossip of the gay world, by which she meant the current events in Mrs. Braidwood's boarding-house. And then they passed—as they always did pass—back to the long ago, when everything was so much better, when the world was brighter and life was more enchanting. They went over their school-days, and the memories of the one suggested the recollections of the other, and the sick man was cheered and declared that all the medicines in the pharmacy were not worth one half-hour's talk of the old days.

Yet, in spite of this amiable boast, and the regular visits of Agatha, who came every day with an amazing contempt for her well-established principles, the invalid made no progress toward recovery, but seemed rather to be losing ground, and

Little Miss Dee

one afternoon as she entered the room, she observed that he did not turn his face to greet her as was his custom. She went softly about the room, thinking he was sleeping, but as she saw him stir she walked softly to the bed where he lay with his face still averted.

“You did not see me when I came in, Herbert,” she said.

“No,” he replied, “I did not see you, Agatha.”

Then she thought to rally him on his lack of gallantry. “I thought you were more polite than that, and you evidently do not care to see me now. Shall I go home in pique?”

He turned at this and looked in the direction from which the voice had come. Then he said, with a half-sob in his voice: “I did not see you—because—because—Agatha—I am blind.”

ONE day it seemed to Agatha that the physician's face was graver as he left the house, and she read in his expression the confirmation of her fears when she first received the message of the illness. It was toward the close of the afternoon, and Ainslie had been restless and little inclined to conversation, and she had sat quietly by the bed absorbed in the reflections of her life. It seemed that everything that had been near to her had passed or was passing away, and she wondered if so much sorrow and bereavement came to others while the impulse of life was still strong and the gray was still young. She did not complain, this woman with the staunch heart and abundant hope, but her mind ran back to the afternoon when she and the sick man at her side had talked together in the park, and she asked herself if it might not be true that she was typified by the flower that bloomed and died at last alone.

Little Miss Dee

Ainslie may have read her thoughts, for after a long interval of silence, he said: "Agatha, when shall I be well again? What does the doctor say?"

As the physician had not made any predictions, and as she had not had the courage to ask him to take her into his confidence, she was able to answer truthfully that she could not answer, but she added, encouragingly, as her own opinion, that everything was hopeful. He smiled sadly and shook his head.

"Why should we attempt to deceive each other or ourselves. I have had no visions, Agatha, and I have dreamed no dreams, but the sign has been given to me." He raised his hand to his blind eyes. "I know that my time has come and that I shall not get well, whatever others may think. We employ physicians to do what they can for us, yet I believe that something tells the sick man in his extremity that which a physician can only surmise through the natural development of disease. Perhaps ordinarily a man in

Little Miss Dee

my condition might recover, and a physician might be right in arguing from a general precedent, but I know instinctively that I am going." He sighed and put out his hand. "I am not so near the shadow as yet," he added, "that you may lead me into it, but I want you to take my hand and let me talk to you with perfect frankness, as I have longed to speak in all the days you have been coming to cheer me."

She took his hand and turned away her face, forgetting that he could not see the truth and anxiety written there.

"That day we were in the park together I pointed out to you the rose dying and alone, and I told you how gloomily it seemed to illustrate the sadness of my own life. I think you agreed with me at the time, but there were many reasons why matters should remain as they were, and I accepted your decision. The oppression of that moment has been with me ever since, and I thank God from the bottom of my heart that my fears were unnecessary,

Little Miss Dee

and that here at the last I am not alone and friendless."

When she did not answer he said: "I am going to die, Agatha, and I have no fear of speaking to you now as I have wished to speak and as you will not forbid me. You mentioned Gertrude, and you said I belonged to her. Well, if there is anything in the faith in which we have been brought up, I may see Gertrude sooner than we think, and I believe I can make my peace with her for everything I may say to you. I have no fear of death or of what may come after I have gone from here, but if I have a feeling of remorse it is because at the end of life my whole existence seems so useless and unprofitable."

At Agatha's expression of dissent he smiled again, and continued: "After all, what does it matter. I have been happy as men go, and I have been prosperous as men think. There was a time when I had certain hopes and ambitions which I have not realized. I dare say that the morning papers will contain a short personal of

Little Miss Dee

respect after I have passed away, and then everybody will settle down to his own affairs, and I shall be forgotten. It might have been different, but I presume, to go back to our favorite excuse, it was all fore-ordained."

"You must not talk in this way," exclaimed Agatha; "it is not true, Herbert, and it is wicked."

"I hope it is not wicked, Agatha," he answered, "but it is certainly true. I lived happily with Gertrude and she was a better wife than I deserved. And still I feel that if her nature had been stronger or mine less weak, my life would have been rounder and more complete. I believe that if I had kept steadily on in the path we were traveling when we were both young and ambitious, and had been steadfast to the ideals we both cherished, and had been mindful of the woman I then loved—you must let me speak now, Agatha—I should have had less at this hour to repent. You cannot change this conviction, Agatha, for at such a time as

Little Miss Dee

this a man speaks with a greater light and a clearer understanding. For myself I have no wish to live, since I have gained all that I can hope for, but it is hard for me to go, dear, and know that I am leaving you just at a time when, with all your strength of character, you may need me."

The tears came to Agatha's eyes at the little word of affection which took her back to the 'springtime they had talked about so much, and she almost grieved that he could not see them as they ran down her cheeks. Where, then, was all this martyrdom to principle, this obligation to a woman long dead, this devotion to a preconceived duty? What was Agatha Dee in a moment of supreme test? A woman, with a woman's sympathy and a woman's tender weakness.

"I have always thought," Ainslie said, "that when it came my time to die, I should like to go back to my childhood home and pass away among the scenes I first knew and loved. Perhaps it is just as well that I cannot, for there must be changes there, and a new growth with a

Little Miss Dee

new people. Yet I think now that I would gladly give years of a life that might be left to me to be back there for a week with you, Agatha—even though you had to lead me in my darkness—just to believe that we were young again, that all these years have been a dream, and that we were starting out full of hope and ambition. To the close of this foolish life of mine I have been an indolent dreamer, and it is natural enough that I should go out still dreaming.”

“Is it right to talk this way?” cried Agatha. “Is it honest? Is it just?”

“Why should it not be? I have tried to be a philosopher with all my dreaming, and when it comes to a man to leave the world, why should not his mind revert to those scenes and those things which bring him the greatest happiness?”

“Because,” said Agatha, “we should rather think of the happiness that is yet to come in the other world.”

“I shall not be unmindful of that, I hope,” replied Ainslie, “but to-day let me

Little Miss Dee

be happy in the thought of what I once had and what I still love. It will all be gone soon enough." He sighed and settled back as if he would give himself up to the thoughts of those vanished joys, but presently he said: "Put your hand under the pillow, Agatha, and take out the case you will find there. Do you know what it is? Do you remember the evening we parted so many years ago, and how I showed you the miniature and told you I should never give it up? I cannot see you with my eyes, Agatha, and I cannot see the miniature, and it is just as well, for mentally I can see both, and it is so pleasant to lie here and dream that I am back in the old home. That night we sat in the garden on the bank overlooking the river! I can see you now, just as you are in the miniature, with your soft hair tied up in a knot behind and waving down over your cheeks, with that high comb at the back and the old cameo brooch fastened at your throat. We quarreled at first that night, didn't we? And I used bitter words which

Little Miss Dee

I soon repented of and took back? Surely there is compensation for the blindness that has overtaken me, for it is so easy to imagine that thirty years are only a night's slumber, and that I can still feel the wind blowing from the prairie, and smell the honeysuckle, and hear the whistle of the steamboat far down the river."

He lay there quietly, lost in the recollections of the past, and Agatha, still holding his hand, allowed her tears to flow unchecked at his picture of the old glad home. He turned his sightless eyes toward her and whispered: "Take the miniature, Agatha, and bring it with you when you come. You must be with me at the end. I shall not torment you long, dear, and remember that what I ask is only right, or I could not ask it at this time."

She waited until she could control her voice before she said: "It is right, and at the end I shall be with you, dear."

A smile of happiness lighted up his face. He carried her hand to his lips and kissed it.

Little Miss Dee

So Agatha Dee sat and waited for the day that was to bring peace and rest to the sufferer, and add for her another to her lost illusions. And the great world that rumbled on outside knew nothing, and would not have cared if it had known, of the bit of human tragedy in the wasted love life of the old maid and the dying man.

LITTLE MISS DEE turned over and over the letter she held in her hand, scanning the business address and fruitlessly attempting to read through the envelope in the manner peculiar to women. Her teeth were set, and there was a flash of defiance in her eye. She had asked Miss Parsons to come to her room, and that grief-pursuing lady, who had enjoyed rather more sorrow of late than she desired, sat opposite, anxiously scanning her friend's face and awaiting developments. "Well, what is it now?" she finally ventured to ask.

"I may as well tell you first as last, Sarah Parsons," Agatha said, resolutely, "I shall not do it."

"Not do what?"

"This is a letter from a lawyer, a man I never heard of," she replied, and then, as if taken with the idea that possibly it might be a clever idea to inform herself of

Little Miss Dee

the contents before saying more, she broke the seal and read slowly to the end. "He asks me to call at his office on important business, and I think I know what that business is. It is the same old wrangle about repairing the sidewalk in front of my property at home, which was broken down through no fault of mine, and evidently this city lawyer has been employed to harass me. I try to pay my bills, Sarah Parsons, but do you think I ought to be imposed on in this manner?"

"It may be something else," suggested Miss Parsons.

"What else can it be? I owe no money and nobody owes me money. And I have heard father say scores of times that the only business lawyers have with people is when they are trying to collect something. I must consult Archibald about this."

"Why not go to the lawyer and find out exactly what the trouble is," said Miss Parsons. "Then if there is any real difficulty you still have Archibald to help you."

Little Miss Dee

“Perhaps you are right,” mused Agatha. “I never thought of that, and after all, I shall find out at once by going myself. Not that I have much curiosity in the matter, but the sooner it is over the better.”

She made all reasonable haste and went down town to the law offices of Wrantham & Wright. A certain amount of red tape was necessary before even a woman with so palpable a grievance as that which actuated Agatha Dee could get past the small boy at the door, the clerk at the counter, and the private secretary at the entrance of the inner chamber, and she felt her spirits sinking and her courage oozing away when she was permitted at last to approach Mr. John Wrantham, senior member of the firm and leading ornament of the bar.

“I have come to see you about that sidewalk, Mr. Wrantham,” Agatha began, timidly. There was a quaver in her voice, and there was a suspicion of tears in her eyes. “I hope we shall understand each other at the start. This seems to me a

Little Miss Dee

very cruel proceeding, and I am afraid I must contest it vigorously.”

Mr. Wrantham was rubbing his chin reflectively when this explosion came. He was a small man physically, with reddish hair that bristled defiantly or cheerfully according to his mood, and it was standing at various angles before Agatha had finished. He looked at the card the secretary brought, then over his spectacles at the little woman in front of him, and then he laughed—a strictly legal laugh acquired by long and successful evasion of contempt of court.

“My dear madam,” he said, waving his hand as an invitation to her to sit down, “I shall be ready, if necessary to assist you in any contest about the sidewalk that seems to trouble you, but I suspect there is no occasion to worry ourselves about it to-day. Possibly there is a slight mistake somewhere. Am I to understand that I have the honor of addressing Miss Agatha Dee?”

“My name is Agatha Dee!”

Little Miss Dee

“And I am also right in believing that you were the friend of the late Herbert Ainslie?”

Agatha's face fell, and she answered, very quietly, “I knew Mr. Ainslie very well. We were friends many years.”

“Yes? I thought so. And did Mr. Ainslie, before his death, have any business conversation with you?”

She looked at the lawyer in surprise. “Business conversation? Of course not. Why should you think of such a thing?”

“Nothing said about money or property?”

“Certainly not.”

The lawyer glanced at her sharply, and Agatha felt her courage vanishing again. He smiled, and said, “Miss Dee, I think I may have pleasant news for you. Mr. Ainslie was my client, and I drew up his will. If you are the Agatha Dee I am looking for, and I believe you are, you are named in the document as the sole beneficiary, and I congratulate you heartily.”

Agatha stared at him helplessly. “Do

Little Miss Dee

you mean to say that Mr. Ainslie in his will has left money to me?"

"Money or its equivalent, enough in fact to make you quite independent for the rest of your life—provided you are not too extravagant," he added, smilingly. "Mr. Ainslie was a cautious man, and a good investor, and while he would not be considered wealthy as fortunes go nowadays, he never had to deny himself in any reasonable way."

Agatha did not hear him. She sat in a sort of stupor, and her mind was off in the little room at the top of Mrs. Braidwood's house. And she said aloud, though as if speaking to herself, "Now I can have that back room on the second story that I have been looking at so long. It has a lovely view and a large grate, and two windows just the right size for flower-boxes. And the closet is ideal."

The lawyer's laugh brought her to herself. "Yes, I think I can promise you the room, Miss Dee, if it is not too expensive. You must make up your mind to keep

Little Miss Dee

within your means, but I dare say you will be able to arrange to gratify your first wish."

She blushed at this. Then her mind traveled quickly to the cemetery where the man who had thought of her was sleeping. And she remembered that he had said that he wished to live only that he might look after her and care for her. Her eyes filled, and when she tried to speak her voice failed. Mr. Wrantham saw her agitation, and said, gently, "I think that is all we may discuss now, Miss Dee. Certain forms and observances must be gone through which we shall look after very shortly. I think perhaps I have told you all you will be able to stand to-day."

As Agatha rose to go, she said, timidly, "Before I do anything foolish, Mr. Wrantham, I should like to know, if you can tell me, something about the value of the estate."

The lawyer's look was quizzically humorous. "I am sorry to say that I cannot tell you exactly at this minute, but I should

Little Miss Dee

say, at a fair estimate, about a hundred thousand dollars."

Agatha gasped. "A hundred thousand dollars! Mercy! is there so much money in the world?"

"But, of course," he added, "you will not rush into any wild extravagances, Miss Dee. I am pretty sure that we can arrange for that room if we are sufficiently economical in other directions. And as for that sidewalk, perhaps it would be cheaper in the long run to give in to the authorities. Still, if you retain me as your counsel, I shall necessarily do what I can to win the case."

Agatha went out into the street with her head swimming. A hundred thousand dollars! Yes, that was the sum he mentioned. There was old Griggs back home who was said to be worth almost a hundred thousand dollars, and people stopped and looked at him as he went along the street. She wondered if the people were looking at her, and if they were nudging one another, and speaking enviously of her

Little Miss Dee

great wealth. Of course she could have that second story back, and fix it up, too. She remembered that the dresser looked a little shabby, and there was a slight crack at the right of the top of the mirror. She should complain of that at once. And occasionally, on Sunday morning, she could have her breakfast sent up, just as old Mrs. Bornham in the second story had been doing for a year. How astonished the people around her would be the first Saturday night she said, "Mrs. Braidwood, you will please send my breakfast to my room to-morrow morning." She would say it without a tremor in her voice, just as composedly as if she thought it a small matter hardly worth mentioning. Indeed, the prospect was so fascinating that she was not sure that she would not anticipate the receipt of her fortune and begin next Saturday night.

"But what selfishness is this, Agatha Dee?" she thought. "Here you are making all sorts of plans for your own lazy comfort, and entirely forgetting the thou-

Little Miss Dee

sands of poor and helpless people you can so easily benefit. How many people in the world, do you think, are so well situated as you, with everything to make you happy, a good home, good friends, and a boy who is going to be famous? I am disgusted with you, Agatha Dee; you seem to have no thought above yourself and your own miserable pleasures.’’

And as she trudged along she communed further: ‘‘Is it proper and dignified for a woman with a hundred thousand dollars to be poking on in this way? How pleasant it would be to call a cab and ride up to the house. The objection to that might be that everybody would think I am ill, and it might cause unnecessary alarm. No, I must be thoughtful as well as prudent. Yet, I wish Sarah Parsons could see me coming home in a cab, handing the driver a dollar, and saying, ‘Never mind the change, my good man.’ Mercy sakes, how I am going on! I am forgetting all that Mr. Wrantham said, and am positively throwing my money away. If I keep on

Little Miss Dee

like this I shall not be able to rent that second-story room after all. And how pleased Archibald will be. Perhaps Luella will be a little more gracious when she finds that her husband's folks have money in the bank, and are able to afford style. Poor girl! it isn't her fault that she is so cold. I know she has a kind heart and the best intentions in the world, but she simply does not know how to let herself out."

A car came along. It was a condescension for a woman of her means to patronize the ordinary method of transit, but Agatha felt that she must begin to give herself a lesson in humility and economy. She dropped into a seat behind two men and surrendered herself to more pleasing thoughts of her opulence and opportunities of doing good. She paid no attention to the conversation of the men in front of her, and was dimly conscious that they were talking of excitement in the stock market, of a panic somewhere, and of great gains and losses—things that could not be of the

Little Miss Dee

slightest interest to her. Presently one of the men said:

“Were many of the boys bitten?”

“Any number of them, and I think it served them right. Mighty little sympathy they’ll get from me. Still I can’t help feeling sorry for Dee.”

Agatha’s heart gave a great leap. The conductor at that moment called out the name of a street, and there was confusion among those leaving the car, but she heard the other man ask:

“What’s the matter with Dee? Did he get caught in the squeeze?”

“Did he? Well, it’s reported that he’s in it all the way from fifty to a hundred thousand dollars. At least that’s the talk at the club, and it came very straight. Dee is a good fellow, and I thought he was too smart to be inveigled into that spider-web. It all goes to show that the stock market will get the best of them when they go to fooling with schemes outside their legitimate business.”

“Just married, isn’t he?”

Little Miss Dee

“He hasn’t been married very long, and that’s the hard part of it. You know Dee had little or no money of his own, and he married old Blatchford’s daughter, who had considerable money in her own right. Of course he has been speculating with his wife’s money, and there’s where the trouble comes in. Did you ever know Luella Blatchford?”

“I’ve never met her, but I’m told she’s very severe.”

“She’s as cold as a fish and as hard as a rock, and why Archie Dee, who is one of the best fellows in the world, ever married her nobody has succeeded in finding out. If I were in his place at this minute, with the knowledge of that miscalculation in stocks hanging over me, I’d never go home. South Africa wouldn’t be too far away for me.”

The car stopped again, and Agatha, hardly conscious of what she was doing, followed in the train of those who got out. She stood on the corner bewildered and frightened. Newsboys were running back

Little Miss Dee

and forth shouting the news of the panic in stocks. The words of the man were still ringing in her ears. Exactly what he meant she could not understand. Disgrace, ruin, poverty, it was all the same to her. She knew only that her boy was in trouble, and her one impulse was to help him, to rescue him, to show him that while one woman might drive him away with reproaches and scorn, there was another who believed in him and would save him. A down-town car stopped at the crossing; she signaled, and went inside.

John Wrantham was picking up his hat and papers just before leaving the office when Agatha, who had fairly brushed aside the door boy and the clerk at the counter and the private secretary, came in upon him. He looked surprised at the informality of the entrance, but said, pleasantly, "Well, Miss Dee, have you come back to tell me that you have found something better than that second-story room?"

"O, Mr. Wrantham," she exclaimed, "don't speak of that folly to me now.

Little Miss Dee

You must help us, you must save us, for we are in great trouble!"

"Trouble?" echoed the lawyer, "as soon as this? Why, it hasn't been thirty minutes since I thought I had banished all your trouble for life."

Agatha repeated as accurately as she could the conversation she had heard in the car. The lawyer listened thoughtfully, and wrinkled his brows as the full import reached him. "It is true that there has been a great slump in stocks," he said, "and I have heard that there has been an unprecedented amount of gambling by outsiders. I know your boy, as you call him, and he is a bright young fellow. Claxton tells me that he will make a fine lawyer, though this is not a very good way of rising in one's profession. Still he is young and unaccustomed to large sums of money, and this lesson, if what you tell me is true, may be the means of curing him of the most idiotic of all forms of folly, and convince him that the best way to succeed in life is to stick to one's legitimate

Little Miss Dee

business. Now, what do you wish me to do?"

"To-day," replied Agatha, impetuously, "you told me that I am rich, that I have come into possession of thousands of dollars. I come to you and tell you that my boy is in trouble, and you ask me what I wish you to do. Does not your natural feeling say what I should do? Mr. Wrantham, I must save my boy."

"Exactly so," said the lawyer, coolly. "Now, assuming that everything is as has been rumored, and I am sorry to say that I fear it is, and Archibald Dee is in financial difficulties, it is perfectly natural that you should wish to help him. But how do you propose to do it? Do you wish to pay his debts?"

"Certainly, as long as he cannot pay them himself."

"Then why do you not go to him and find out the facts in the case, and exactly, if possible, the extent of his liabilities. If they are not too heavy perhaps we may arrange a way of paying them."

Little Miss Dee

“Go to him with such an offer? You don’t know Archie, and how proud he is. Do you think I could humiliate him by letting him know that I am paying off his obligations? That would never do. We must think of a better plan than that.”

“I am not worrying very much about his pride,” retorted the lawyer, a little gruffly, “and I confess I do not see my way clear to any easy way of meeting the difficulty. The estate was not left to him, and it would be absurd to think of humbugging him into believing that he is Herbert Ainslie’s heir. Moreover, it is legally impossible. It would be equally out of the question to try to convince him that he has received so large an estate from any other source without showing the papers and documents. I commend your disinterestedness and unselfish purpose, Miss Dee, but I say again that I do not see how we are going to accomplish this task while you remain in the background.”

“And yet you are a lawyer,” said Agatha, “and probably pride yourself on

Little Miss Dee

your shrewdness. Here I have come to you and put all my fortune in your hands and tell you to take it and save my boy, and you reply that you do not see how we can do it. I thought a lawyer could do anything with money."

"Since you put it that way," and he smiled grimly, "you excite my professional zeal and conceit. Now tell me, does Archibald Dee know anything about this legacy?"

"How should he? I have known it myself less than an hour."

"And he understands that you have no money—I mean, of course, no large sum of money?"

He understands that perfectly."

"Well, we shall try the only plan that is in the least degree feasible, and even that may fail. When a man is in desperate straits—as Dee must be if he has sunk his wife's money—he is likely to grasp at anything without asking too many embarrassing questions. Dee does not know that we are acquainted. He knows nothing of

Little Miss Dee

the will or the legacy. He believes you have only the small income on which you have lived. Very good; I shall go to him therefore as the agent of a friend, who wishes to be unknown for the present, and shall offer to aid him and pay off his obligations if possible. This seems like an absurd proposition to a man in his sensible moments, but the chances are that he will be so glad of any assistance that he will look at it as a gift from heaven, and ask for no particulars. I do not know how large his indebtedness is, or whether I can realize enough on Mr. Ainslie's securities to meet it. But whatever may be the sum I advance, I shall make it clear to him that it is only a loan, and must be repaid as soon as possible. Does this meet your approval?"

"Entirely," exclaimed Agatha, rapturously. "And I know it will succeed. I wish to apologize to you, Mr. Wrantham, for the ill-natured remark I made a moment ago. You are certainly an able lawyer."

Little Miss Dee

“Thank you for the compliment. I hope I shall continue to grow in your good opinion. And now forgive me, Miss Dee, if I seem to be a little brutal, but we able lawyers must be sure of our ground. Are you perfectly content to make this sacrifice?”

“It is no sacrifice, Mr. Wrantham, to give up what I have never had.”

“But it amounts to the same thing. Consider for a moment, my dear madam, if you please. The payment of this indebtedness may sweep away your whole fortune, may deprive you of comforts to which your age entitles you. By your own wish nobody will ever hear of your good deed. Your adopted son himself, unconscious that the unknown friend is one so near to him, and knowing nothing of your privation, may be cunning enough and unscrupulous enough, to default. You will shut yourself out from every avenue of gratitude, and while I may strive to secure payment of the money, it may be entirely out of my power to do so. Have you thought of all this?”

Little Miss Dee

The tears stood in Agatha's eyes. "Mr. Wrantham, I have no desire to think of it. I believe, as I believed in the steadfastness of Herbert Ainslie's friendship, that this money was given to me as the means of doing good. I was perfectly happy and contented before I received your letter, and I shall be just as happy to-day when I go back to my little room. In fact, I shall be even happier," she added, gently, "for I shall feel that I have saved my boy."

The lawyer rose from his chair and came over to Agatha. His voice was a little husky as he said: "When I drew up Mr. Ainslie's will, Miss Dee, we talked together freely, as old friends may. He told me, among other things connected with his life, and I may say, with you, the interesting story of your family prophecy, and in naming you as the sole recipient of his estate, he said, 'John, Agatha Dee is the last of her family. This sort of assistance may be of no value, but I am going to do what I can to help her to succeed where the others have failed.' "

Little Miss Dee

He turned away and cleared his throat. And then he exploded, "Miss Dee, I am honored by your presence and your confidence. I wish Ainslie could be here at this moment to see how nobly he has succeeded. Madam, will you permit me to kiss your hand? This is true heroism, and the prophecy is fulfilled!"

THE footing of the Archibald Dees was firmly established. Many envied and nobody disputed their social position, and when Mrs. Dee spoke in her haughty, imperious, judicial manner, the proposition under debate was dismissed as settled. The slight suspicion with which Archibald had been regarded in business circles at the time of the flurry in stocks had been banished by his manly course in promptly arranging for the payment of his obligations in full, and he was pointed out as a shining example of commercial integrity by old men to their sons. Everybody declared that doubtless the matter had been greatly exaggerated, and there was general congratulation, for Dee was a fine fellow who deserved all the prosperity that could come to him. Wrantham, the lawyer, had judged shrewdly when he said that Archibald would be too overjoyed at his release from trouble and worry to press questions

Little Miss Dee

which could not be answered, but Wrantham did not hesitate to represent to him that he would be held strictly responsible by his unknown friend for the repayment of every dollar advanced. To this Archibald readily assented, realizing that payment in the indefinite future is much to be preferred to exposure and possible ruin in the present.

It had come to Mrs. Dee's ears, through the kindness of one of her closest women friends, that they were supposed to have suffered serious financial reverses, and the proud-spirited woman, chafing under so absurd an imputation, had determined to give a reception that in point of brilliancy and magnificence would expose the hollowness of such gossip. The list of notable guests, in accordance with the custom of the Dee household, had not been referred to Archibald for his inspection, and it was by the merest accident that he learned that Agatha's name had been omitted. Archibald was a peace-loving young man, and he therefore suggested in the mildest

Little Miss Dee

of tones that it would gratify him extremely if his mother could be included in the list of guests. Luella, always cool and rational, endeavored to point out to him how absurd such inclusion would be; that Agatha did not mingle at all in the exclusive set; that her presence would be embarrassing to herself, and unrecognized by the company; and that such experiments invariably proved disastrous. Whereupon Archibald, with a brave show of unexpected spirit, declared that it was not his mother's fault that she did not move among their friends, and that if she would not be recognized the embarrassment would be naturally removed. To this Luella responded that she had made out the list according to her ideas of propriety and would not change it, but that if Archibald chose to ask his mother, and would be responsible for her entertainment, he was at perfect liberty to do so. For her part she believed it would be a distinct kindness to say nothing to her, for she dressed like a guy, and was sure to do or say something that would be mortifying.

Little Miss Dee

So Archibald, somewhat more than half-convinced that a great deal of his wife's argument was true, but ashamed to admit that his mother was not up to the standard of his friends, went off to the Braidwood house to interview the unconscious lady in dispute. It gratified him to see that he was received with the usual demonstrations of affection, for his business and social engagements, especially since the little affair of the stock market, had prevented him from showing such attentions as may be naturally expected from a son. He set forth the nature of his errand with an awkwardness that did not allay Agatha's suspicions.

"Perhaps I am not quite up to the ways of your grand world, Archie," she said, "but I know enough to understand that if Luella had wished me to come to her reception she would not have sent you with a verbal message. But never mind, my boy; such things do not interest me in the smallest degree, and if I have any grudge against Luella, it is not because she does

Little Miss Dee

not ask me to her social gatherings, but because she is so attractive that I see very little of you.”

Then Archibald, who was kindly at heart, and who loved his little mother as much as a man in his position can be expected with reason to love, sat down and allowed her to pet him, and to tell him how many fine things she had heard about him, and how he was sure to make a great stir in the world, and what a source of pleasure and comfort he had been and always would be to her. And if she rambled a little in her talk, and showed occasionally strange lapses of memory, he was too absorbed to notice such small details. When a man is conscious that he has discharged an important duty, and has stood loyally and nobly by his mother, he may be forgiven if he overlooks the minor matters of filial affection. Had he not vindicated himself in the position he had taken? Had he not shown Luella that however she might argue he would not be swerved from his filial purpose? In the desultory conversation noth-

Little Miss Dee

ing was said of the transaction in stocks, the woman was too generous to approach a subject that might bring pain, the man presumably too considerate to worry his mother with a recital of business troubles which she could not understand and which happily had passed. He spoke of her health and of her condition; he expressed the greatest interest in her welfare, and he went even so far as to intimate that anything he could do for her further comfort would be cheerfully done. And so, having discharged his obligation, eased his conscience, and put himself unequivocally in the right, Archibald gave voice to his regret at Agatha's unalterable decision, impressed a filial kiss on her cheek, and departed. Three days later the reception came off as duly advertised, and was justly pronounced the crowning glory of the season.

Meanwhile, John Wrantham, who was by profession a lawyer and by nature an honest man, and who despised cant and pretense with all the vigor of his fearless soul, stewed and fumed under the ban of

Little Miss Dee

secrecy which had been put upon him. Mrs. Wrantham had been one of the guests at the reception, and her extravagant praises of that notable function had stirred her husband to the direst wrath, much to the good woman's amazement. And when she happened to say, honestly, but unguardedly, that it was very diplomatic on the part of Luella not to invite her husband's mother, for she is such a frump, poor Wrantham went almost apoplectic in his disgust, and behaved in a manner that excited for the time just apprehension as to his sanity.

The world had now adjusted itself, just as the gentle reader would desire. Youth, ambition, the pride of life, the hope of the nation in the younger generation, the bulwark of our fashionable social fabric—all were prosperous, happy, admired, respected. What did it matter that up in the top story of a respectable boarding-house an old maid was dragging out the few years left to her? Her day had passed, her opportunities had gone. Away

Little Miss Dee

with all thoughts of these impediments to glorious enterprises and of these hangers-on in the march of human progress! Give room to the people of action, the forces of accomplishment!

Happily it was not given to Agatha Dee to know that she was no longer of importance to the calculations of any human being. It had not been revealed to her in a vision or told to her by human lips that she was living, but inconsequential, breathing, but not under consideration. As long as she could find the small amount of money necessary to pay for her room and food she would be permitted to be counted in the national and municipal census; further than this she could have no reasonable expectation of recognition. These human fossils, these decaying leftovers of humanity, are so tiresome. Poor old Agatha Dee!

But poor old Agatha Dee was not miserable; she was not even unhappy as humanity goes. She lived contentedly in the upper story, and when the birds sang and

Little Miss Dee

the sun shone, and the flowers in her window-box smiled and nodded in the sunlight, she rejoiced that she was a part of such a beautiful world. And when the winter came on with its fierceness, and the wind howled, and the snow flew, and from her window she could see the great waves of the lake dashing up against the shore, she gave thanks that she was provided with so snug a home, and that all things had been made so cozy and comfortable for her. Happy Agatha Dee!

IT was whispered about in the dining-room and wherever the members of Mrs. Braidwood's select family of boarders gathered together that there was a gradual tendency toward stronger peculiarities in Agatha Dee which they could not quite explain. In many ways she was the same—cheerful, uncomplaining, pleased with whatever was done for her, and contented with what came. But strange caprices seemed to dominate her; at times she would seek solitude for hours, and whoever passed her door could hear her talking and sometimes laughing to herself, apparently addressing her own image, as if conveying secrets of the utmost importance. And at such times the boarders would look at one another and tap their foreheads significantly and say what a pity it was that Little Miss Dee was growing so queer. Miss Parsons, who was as grievously disturbed as a woman born to and expecting trouble can

Little Miss Dee

be disturbed, related to Mrs. Braidwood that Agatha's mother had been very like her, and that her father was always eccentric, but that notwithstanding the discouraging symptoms no harm ever came from them; it was merely the extraordinary family way.

There were times also when Agatha would sit at her window for hours and look out upon the water, and watch the great steamers as they came slowly into port, and once when she was rallied on the whim, and asked what she found so fascinating in the spectacle, she replied, with all seriousness, that she often wondered if somebody on board might not be coming to see her, and she had thought how pleasant it would be to be summoned to the parlor by the news that a stranger had arrived on the boat, and had driven up in a carriage to inquire for Miss Dee. When young Perkins, who went to Europe twice a year for a large importing house, and who was given to flashy waistcoats and an explosive manner of talking, heard this, he was

Little Miss Dee

moved in his honest heart, and vowed that after his next voyage he would carry out the programme to the letter, and would drive up in the best state imaginable, and in the finest carriage he could hire, and ask for Miss Dee. Perkins was so good-hearted that he had the reputation in the higher circles of society of being a rather vulgar fellow.

As the days went on it occurred to Agatha that she was not living in the manner that would be approved by Archibald and Luella. She admitted in a long and confidential talk with Mrs. Braidwood that she was perfectly satisfied with her room and surroundings, and that under existing conditions she had no immediate intention of changing them; still she believed it was her serious duty to try to conform to those exactions which would be naturally put upon a woman with such aristocratic connections. Accordingly she felt that in future she must have a regular reception day, and she explained further that she would be greatly obliged to Mrs.

Little Miss Dee

Braidwood if she could be permitted to use a part of the large drawing-room for this purpose. Mrs. Braidwood, who was also good-hearted to the point of vulgarity, cordially assented, and thereupon went about her regular duties shedding a few sympathetic and middle-class tears.

The importance of this undertaking appealed mightily to Agatha Dee. How gratified Archibald would be when he learned that his little mother was living up as far as possible to the standards of Luella and her friends, and making an honest effort to adapt her simple tastes to rigorous conventions. Perhaps even Luella might be pleased, and—who could tell?—perhaps in time her grand carriage might roll up to the door and be seen of all the neighbors. A year ago this honor might not have appealed so strongly to Agatha, but that was a year ago; she was wiser now, and older, too, and her heart was lonely, and it seemed to her in the evening of the tragedy of life that we must forget the little differences of our impetuous and

Little Miss Dee

unthinking years, and draw more closely to those who should be bound to us.

So Little Miss Dee named Thursday as her reception day, and eagerly arrayed herself for the initial solemnity. And if any woman of a kindly instinct could have seen her as she put on her receiving gown, she would not have had the heart to tell her that her costume was pathetic to the border of the tragic. Ten minutes before the hour she went into the drawing-room, communing eagerly and expectantly with herself as she passed down the stairs, and sat and waited. The door bell rang and ladies were ushered in; other women of the house came down to receive their friends, and the afternoon shadows lengthened into twilight, but nobody asked for Agatha Dee. Wearily she went back as she came, explaining to herself the reason of the failure of the afternoon, and stopping before the mirror on the landing of the stairs to confide to her reflection the excuse that doubtless her friends had not yet learned that this was her reception

Little Miss Dee

day, and that it would be the better attended next week.

But the second week was like the first, and the third like the second, yet Agatha, conscious that she was discharging her duty to Archibald and society, pertinaciously hung on. Then Mrs. Braidwood, unable to stand the strain on her kindly feelings, hatched an amiable conspiracy among the ladies of the house, and easily prevailed upon them to send in their cards at various hours of the afternoon to the end that Agatha might be benevolently humbugged. And Perkins—vulgar Perkins! with his flashy waistcoats and his “Between you and I”—came home from the store an hour earlier than he might be a party to this wicked plot, and add a little sunshine to a human life.

These acts of remembrance and pity, however honorable to the perpetrators, had no significance beyond natural kindness to Agatha Dee. Her only thought was that this is a very just and appreciative and beautiful world, and that she could

Little Miss Dee

never sufficiently repay the kindnesses that were showered upon her. And why should she not be happy? Was she not living in a comfortable home, surrounded by good people who were all consideration and gentleness? Was she not the mother of a man, still young, who was greatly esteemed in the high business and social circles in which he moved? Did he not with filial tenderness come to see her as often as his imperative engagements would permit—sometimes even twice in a single week? And Little Miss Dee's voice would tremble and her lips would quiver as she would declare with gratitude that a woman must be deficient, indeed, if she could not be happy with such accumulated blessings.

And there were other times when her mind was clouded and when the ghosts would come from the distant country and walk before her and talk to her of the joy of youth and the long ago. And then the world would be still more radiant, and to the pleasure of reality would be added the happiness of dreaming, and in the hours of

Little Miss Dee

elusive fancy it was easy to believe that those who had gone before were merely in some pleasant far-off land, to be reached by ordinary postal service. At such times Little Miss Dee, always with a sense of her responsibilities, would sit at her desk and write letters full of hope and cheerfulness, which, through some unexplained process, would invariably find their way in an unfinished state to a great drawer of miscellaneous manuscript, and so be forgotten.

On the anniversary of Herbert Ainslie's death Agatha was wandering in this strange and pleasant country, and wondering why he had not written to her, and what he could be doing to remain so long silent. She remembered confusedly that once before he had gone away from her, and years had passed in forgetfulness; but that was when they were both young and thoughtless—for what are pledges in the frivolity of youth?—before he had sailed on his last voyage. She was looking out of the window at the water and the steamer leaving the port, just as it seemed to her

Little Miss Dee

misty mind she had seen him sail away—had she not been with him, and had he not told her she must always be near him? How well she recalled that conversation, and how she had tried to cheer him when his fears were strongest and when he lamented because he was leaving her alone. Perhaps even now he was despondent and troubled, and longing to hear from her. With this recollection strong upon her, she wrote:

If you only could have heard the kind and appreciative words that were said of you after that sad day you left us, you would be sorry that you judged the world and the people so harshly. I hope when it comes our time to die, Herbert, our friends may still be as good and generous. In the sensitiveness of your nature you thought that the world had forgotten you; you could not understand, as I know now, that we must put our friends to the test sometimes and go on long, long journeys before we learn that friendship or affection is not to be judged by the ordinary standards of acquaintance, and that those from whom we expect the least may give us the most.

I have missed you sadly, Herbert, and I shall miss you until you come back to us, but I am not unhappy for everybody is so good to me and looks after me, and my only regret is that I have nobody who can talk with me of our beautiful past in the old

Little Miss Dee

home with the old scenes. How much I shall have to say to you when we meet!

You will be glad to know that Archibald is just as affectionate and thoughtful as ever, and that everybody praises him and speaks enthusiastically of his prospects. We made no mistake when we finally settled on him to fulfill the prophecy. That prophecy! How we have laughed at it in the foolish younger days, and how little we knew that in time its strength and certainty would appeal to us and its prediction would be verified. And to think that I should have been thought of in connection with any heroic achievement while my boy was living! We can well afford to laugh at that phase of it now that he is about to take the responsibility off my poor feeble hands.

It is such a beautiful day, Herbert, and I find my eyes wandering from the paper to the view out of the window. The impulse is so strong on me that I must certainly go to the park. How I wish you were here to go with me. It was just such a day as this when we went together the summer before you sailed away. Why is it that on such days I am always thinking of our childhood and the old home, the beautiful river running below the elms, the evenings we passed at the foot of the garden, and the—

IN the general estimation—and who does not defer obsequiously to the general estimation?—John Wrantham, attorney at law, was a particularly hard-headed man of business, not given to outbursts of sentiment or appreciably affected by romantic considerations. If this opinion had been expressed to Mr. Wrantham, he would have regarded himself flattered, for your particularly hard-headed man of business, strangely enough, is not disposed to be proud of the kinder emotions which are happily the saving grace of his life. Yet Mr. Wrantham was compelled to admit to himself, however he may have endeavored to conceal it from the world, that he was greatly moved by the incident that had claimed his professional attention, and that his reputation, so far as his personal feeling was concerned, was at stake. He had never wholly recovered from the burst of admiration excited by what he chose to

Little Miss Dee

consider the exact fulfillment of the family prophecy, and while in the abstract he abhorred prophecies as a futile superstition, he was inclined to look upon the augury of the Dees as an interesting phenomenon which could not be interpreted by any strictly legal rules. Now that the prophecy had been fully vindicated, Mr. Wrantham argued that all obligation to the gypsy lady and the family superstition was ended, and that it was clearly his duty and right, as a lawyer and promoter of justice, to see that no undue suffering should fall upon the innocent.

In a diplomatic and unobtrusive way Mr. Wrantham had kept an eye on Agatha, safeguarding her interests wherever possible, and showing such little kindnesses as were in his power. He had been profoundly stirred by the development of her malady, and he spent many hours debating with himself the reasonableness of considering at an end the bond of silence imposed upon him. Unfortunately for his own wishes, he saw his client only in her per-

Little Miss Dee

fectly rational moments, when all suggestions for a complete understanding with Archibald brought forth positive refusal with an appeal for the sanctity of the compact. And Mr. Wrantham would yield the point with great reluctance, contending strenuously that the position was not only unbusinesslike, but an encouragement of irresponsibility. At which Agatha would smile and shake her head as one entitled to have the greatest confidence in human nature.

But if John Wrantham could not produce the desired impression on Agatha, he could at least make a little headway with Archibald, to whom he represented that the anonymous friend and preserver, while not wishing to put him to unnecessary trouble, would consider it a good business indication if he would pave the way to a partial settlement as early as possible. And Archibald, who was an honorable man in such small affairs, despite his obligations to the higher circles which he adorned, agreed that this was only fair, and that he

Little Miss Dee

would bend his energies to this purpose. With this Mr. Wrantham was compelled perforce to be content, though the delay on the one hand and the absolute refusal to press matters on the other, were constantly harassing his business principles.

It was also not a little through Mr. Wrantham's influence that Archibald—who was a busy man—tore himself away from his many exacting pursuits and gave several hours each week to the little mother, who looked longingly for his coming, yet found excuses for him in his absence. The reports of her mental condition had given Archibald much solicitude, and he had discussed with Luella the propriety and humanity of giving her a home with them, that she might receive more constant and loving attention during her terms of flightiness, but that amiable and prudent lady had easily shown the impossibility of such a step, and Archibald had been convinced, and had not allowed his heart to dominate his judgment. To this many other prominent and successful citi-

Little Miss Dee

zens have correctly attributed their steady rise in life.

And so in a smooth and monotonous way the life of Agatha Dee progressed. Winter was coming on, the flowers in the window-boxes were dead, and the waves of the lake came rolling in with greater force. No answer had come from the far-off countries, and the friends to whom Agatha had written, but the silence, at which she sometimes wondered, made no more than a fleeting impression, and the less shadowy trials were staunchly borne by that brave heart and tranquil spirit. The world was still unchangeably beautiful, and humanity had lost nothing of its goodness. Late in December Agatha had gone on a journey of unusual length, returning mysteriously each evening to confide to Miss Parsons fragments of the conversations she had held with her father and Herbert Ainslie, and the friends of her youth now living in a mystic land. And Miss Parsons had listened loyally to the wonderful tales she told, and had humored her in her glowing fan-

Little Miss Dee

cies, only to weep alone at the pathos of so much happiness.

The day before Christmas, while Agatha was busily writing to the spirits of those in whom her thoughts were centered, Miss Parsons slipped away and went down to Mr. Wrantham's office and laid the whole case before him with the precision of her New England nature, not hesitating to tell him what should be done. And Mr. Wrantham, who had even more cause for precipitation than Miss Parsons, wiped his spectacles while he swallowed the lump in his throat, and formed his resolution on the minute. Of what use were promises at such a time? What mattered it that he had given his word of loyalty to an unwise compact? In all this world there is only one thing fixed, immutable, unswerving—justice. To the lawyer's mind there was no other consideration, yet how much more appealing is justice when it goes hand in hand with humanity. Even John Wrantham must have admitted that.

It had been the custom of the Dees—so

Little Miss Dee

the family tradition went—to make much of the Christmas festival, and as far back as Agatha could remember there was great festivity at Christmas time, with holly and mistletoe, an immense tree loaded down with gifts and remembrances, and a whole week of cheer and jollity. With each recurring Christmas Agatha had seen the circle narrowing, but every year she clung loyally to the family custom, and was filled with the gracious spirit of the season. And what more natural than that in this pleasant year of spiritual reunion she should feel more strongly than ever the ruling ardor of Christmastide and should make her plans for a celebration of more than ordinary magnitude? She would not let anybody into her secret; she was too cunning for that. This was to be her surprise, her own individual effort, and what happiness there would be on Christmas morning when the whole innocent plot was revealed and the company of friends trooped to her room to admire her tree and share its splendor. At such a time would it not be possible

Little Miss Dee

that even the proud Luella would come, and that everything would be forgiven and forgotten while she joined in the remembrances of the happy day? Perhaps the gentle spirit of Christmas would soften her, and perhaps it might come about that all these months of coldness and separation were merely a subterfuge to test the strength of Agatha's character and to teach her a lesson in humility and patience. Yes, provision should be made for this woman who may have been greatly misunderstood. How strange it was to Agatha that this had never come to her before.

But the magnitude of the undertaking soon convinced Little Miss Dee that it was necessary to have a confederate, and who so available and trustworthy as small Eleanor, the pretty child who lived on the second floor, and who often climbed to the fourth story to talk over her childish troubles with the sympathetic old maid? Eleanor was young and quick and cunning for her years, and it would be the easiest thing in the world to smuggle in the Christ-

Little Miss Dee

mas tree unobserved by the neighbors. Even if the child were observed, suspicion would not be excited; such was the pleasing power of Agatha's fancy. For she was living in the wildness and madness of fairy land, and at the Christmas time all the fairies conspire to blind the eyes of those who should not see and to work in harmony with the children and with those who have slipped back to childhood.

Thus it happened that the small Eleanor tramped up and down the stairs on her mysterious mission, observed by everybody and understood by all. Yet nobody questioned her, for the conspiracy in the old maid's room was a common secret, and the pitying impulse forbade the breaking of the spell. And it was agreed in a counterplot that Agatha should have such a Christmas as seldom falls to the human lot, and there was much consultation with great parleying, and the entire household, from vulgar Perkins at the first table to the humble scrub girl in the kitchen, eagerly brought gifts to heap around Agatha's chair in the

Little Miss Dee

breakfast-room and to testify to the lovable influence of that gentle life.

So early in the eventful evening before Christmas small Eleanor slipped away from those who were furtively and curiously watching her and ran up the stairs to the secret chamber to assist in the final arrangements as had been planned. She found Little Miss Dee standing before her tree with the red glow of happiness on her face and a brilliant light in her eye. Who would not have been happy at such a sight? There stood the tree, towering three feet high, with its shining balls and colored candles, fantastically trimmed with the oddest and most bewildering shades of ribbon and loaded down with souvenirs that might have come from the magic trunk of centuries gone by. The child hesitated at the doorway. Something seemed to tell her that all her own work had vanished, that she was no longer a part of this Christmas, that the world had rolled back and away from her, and that she had no place in this strange land.

Little Miss Dee

"Come in, Eleanor," cried Little Miss Dee. "There is so much to do, and we have no time to lose. They will all be here in the morning, and we must be ready. Here are the pictures of father and mother and Herbert. Take them and place them around the tree where they will be in full view. They will be so pleased when they see how carefully I have preserved them."

"But, Miss Dee," faltered the child, "you didn't tell me about them. I didn't know you were expecting anybody away from the house except Mr. Archibald and his wife. And we haven't any presents for them."

"O, yes we have," said Agatha, triumphantly. "I must have told you about them and you have forgotten. The presents are here, as you shall see. Do you think I could let a Christmas go by without remembering my own family?"

The child mechanically took up and distributed the pictures as she was directed—strange, old-fashioned pictures, dim and

Little Miss Dee

faded in battered cases, grotesque enough to this little modern child who marveled at their oddity. Little Miss Dee took one of them from her, the ambrotype of a boy just coming into manhood, with an honest, open face, and a strong figure, stiff and uncomfortable in the pose and quaint in the severity of costume. A tenderer light came into the old maid's eyes as she looked at it.

"You have never seen Mr. Ainslie," she said; "he is older now, but you will recognize him at once from this picture, and I hope you will like him as much as I know he will like you."

"Why, I—I thought Mr. Ainslie was—" and the word mercifully died on her lips.

"You thought he was not coming," interrupted Agatha, with a smile, "but he is. I wrote to him that he must come. And I have a present for him, too," she added, mysteriously, "which I shall give him with my own hand. I promised him as much."

The child walked uneasily around the

Little Miss Dee

tree. Had she not been a child she would have known that the room at that moment was filled with ghosts—harmless, tender, loving ghosts—who had come back from the shadows to gladden an old maid's Christmas eve and fill her thoughts with a happiness long past. Even as it was, she felt some strange influence at work so much at variance with her expectations of the evening and the trimming of the tree. And Agatha, wrapped up in her own fancies, forgot her presence.

“I wonder which will come first—Herbert or Archie,” she whispered. “I wonder which will be more anxious to see me. Of course father will be stirring about long before the rest; it was always his way. Dear old father, how happy he will be when he hears how nobly Archie is fulfilling the prophecy, and how he will thank me for bringing it about. But I shall tease him for presuming to think that I was strong or clever enough to take a man's burden.”

“Miss Dee,” said the child, timidly,

Little Miss Dee

“if you don’t mind I think I ought to go now.”

Little Miss Dee had left the tree and was standing at the window looking out on the glistening lake. She did not hear the spoken words, and the child, with a frightened look, stood motionless with her hand on the knob of the door.

“Miss Dee!” And when a second time there came no answer, the child opened the door softly and as softly closed it and stole away. And if again she had not been a child she would have known that there were those around the silent woman, speaking to her of the Christmas past, and bringing her the fullness of happiness and peace.

The moon shone full across the lake that night, and glancing in at the window rested first on the glittering baubles of a fantastic tree before it lighted up the quiet face of Little Miss Dee as she lay so still and peaceful with her hand tightly clasping the miniature of a young girl. “I promised him,” she said before she went to rest.

The Christmas sun, as brilliantly shin-

Little Miss Dee

ing, fell on the little tree piteously poor and shabby in the morning light. The sunbeams dancing through the room showed three figures standing in the presence of the mystery. The face of the first spoke sorrow and sympathy and pity. The second, a woman, had halted in the doorway, and the searching rays betrayed the look, half bewildered, half remorseful. The third knelt by the bedside, his eyes averted from the calm, dead face, and his head buried in his hands. And perhaps he was praying.

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